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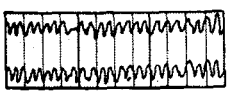

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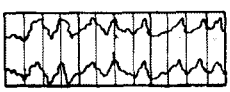

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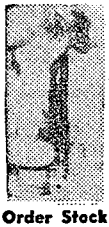

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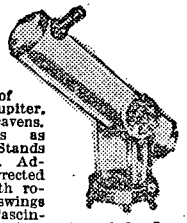

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FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

No. 35
February,
1958
35¢

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Editor: ROBERT A. W. LOWNDES DOROTHY B. SEADOR, Asso. Ed.
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AUTHOR, AUTHOR!

WALLACE WEST, a veteran hand in science fiction, is a public relations expert in the oil industry. He's written numerous articles relating to the fuel problem of tomorrow, and is thoroughly familiar with the types of situations that arise in promotion campaigns — which adds to the credibility of the fantastic centennial described in this story.

DAVID GORDON, though not a pen-name for Gordon R. Dickson, is like Dickson in one respect: he has the light touch. It may be just a touch, as in "The Convincer", or it may be uproarious, as in "Look Out, Duck!" And, as with Dickson, there's always solid meat, along with the humor in Gordon's stories.

CAROL EMSHWILLER's stories do not show the "typical" characteristics of tales by some female science-fictionists. They aren't attempts to swashbuckle so that readers will think she's a man; nor are they heart-throb-and-diapers accounts such as you find in the slicks. They're individual, and a needed reminder that God created science fictionists male and female, too!

ISAAC ASIMOV loves to see his name in print, even though this runs the horrible risk of mis-spelling it. Most editors and readers also love to see it, too. On the other hand, MICHAEL ZUROY is just starting to take the chance of having his name mis-handled in type — but if he continues along the line of "Wheels", I think you'll agree that the risk will increase.

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WHEELS

by

Michael Zuroy

illustrated by FREAS

Ker-Kermit plotted better than he realized when he entered his superior's name, along with his own, in the Fly-Wheels exhibition in honor of visiting aliens. For if Alph Agar lost, he would lose his life!

ALONE IN his office, Alph Agar, Director of the Ossining Unit of Budd-Jarvis Fly-Wheels, was crouching over his desk, clenched hands rotating alternately clock-wise and counter-clockwise. Thus occupied, he did not hear his secretary come in.

"What—w h a t's the matter?" gasped Jean-Jean.

Agar straightened slowly, feeling a complete fool. A man should not allow his secretary to catch him in such a ridiculous position. What was he to tell Jean-Jean? Not the truth, certainly.

"Torgian calisthenics," explained Agar. "No need to be alarmed, Jean-Jean. Simply a new variation; very relaxing."

Jean-Jean gave him a long look and went to her desk. He grew absorbed in the back of her neck, the coppery hair, and the clean-limbed figure in the iridescent green tunic. Why, thought Agar, must he always be remembering his dignity as a Director? Why couldn't he just stride over to her, and...

And what? When had he ever known how to handle a woman? Preparation for the Director of a Fly-Wheel unit had not included instruction on the opposite sex. From his boyhood there had been long years of scientific, mathematical, engineering, statistical, financial, economic and legal schooling; there had been single-minded dedication to his job as he struggled upwards through man-killing

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The Fly-Wheel zoomed into the shop . . .

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competition. There had been no time for women.

So that here he was at thirty-six, holder of one of the world's more responsible positions, director and coordinator of a complex plant covering more than five square miles and employing over eight thousand people, and without the slightest notion as to how to approach a girl like Jean-Jean.

HE HADN'T minded too much, up to now. But Jean-Jean...well, it was a warming, if far-f e t c h e d, thought that someday she might call him by the intimate, Alph, instead of the formal, Alph Agar. Close friends and relatives, wives and sweethearts used the intimate; nobody, except his immediate family, had ever called him Alph...

Ker-Kermit, Assistant Director of the Fly-Wheel unit, stepped into the office, crackling, "Good-morning, good-morning, good-morning." He threw his wiry frame into a zilxitron chair and ran a hand over his crisp black hair, watching Agar with an alert expression.

Agar passed a hand over his eyes. The man made him weary. It wasn't so much that he knew Kermit was after his job; that was to be expected, he supposed. It was that boundless, efficient energy. He, himself, was exhausted at the end of a day; where did Kermit get that eternal drive?

"What can I do for you, Ker-Kermit?"

"Old fellow," said Kermit. When Kermit said, 'old fellow', thought Agar, it did not sound idiomatic; it sounded as if it meant, old fellow. "I knew you'd be pleased," said Kermit, a combination of mockery and triumph glinting in his eyes. "I took the liberty of entering your name together with my own. I know you must be a crack Fly-Wheel pilot. Of course, the Board will contact you for personal confirmation, and if you'd like to back out, I'm sure they'll understand."

Agar noticed Jean-Jean's ears assume a listening look. "Wait a minute," he said slowly. "Are you t a l k i n g about the exhibitions in honor of the visiting Betelgeusians? You entered my name as a participant?"

KERMIT looked at him with a show of anxiety. "You are pleased, I hope, Alph Agar? I'm in it myself, you know. The notice from the Board expressed a desire for volunteers from the executive level, and so I thought the least we could do... Like most executives, you are a crack pilot— I'm sure of that, even though I can't recall ever seeing you pilot a Fly-Wheel. You seem to prefer a personal chauffeur at all times, don't you, Alph Agar? Some narrow minds might deduce from that, that...but

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that would be ridiculous, wouldn't it? I am positive that you are an expert pilot, Alph Agar."

"Yes, yes, of course," said Agar. "Well, thank you Ker-Kermit."

"You're entirely welcome." The glint of mockery showed once more in Kermit's eyes and he left.

Jean-Jean swung around in her chair. "That Ker-Kermit!" she burst out, her pretty face tight with anger. "Of all the insufferable..."

"Jean-Jean," said Agar dully. "I may as well tell you. I can't operate a Fly-Wheel."

"You mean...at all?"

"At all."

"But that's impossible, Alph Agar! *Everybody* operates Fly-Wheels nowadays! Old ladies, invalids, children, everybody! Even dogs have been trained to pilot Fly-Wheels. Do you expect me to believe that you, Direcor of a Fly-Wheel Manufacturing Unit, can't pilot one?"

"No, I can't," said Agar.

JEAN-JEAN stared at him, adjusting herself to the idea. Once adjusted, she became decisive. "All right then, you'll simply tell the Board that Ker-Kermit submitted your name without your knowledge or permission, and that you don't wish to participate in the exhibition."

"No," said Agar, miserably. "I can't do that either. In the first place, they wouldn't like my backing out; but more important than that, in their thorough-going way they would invesigate further, and discover that I don't hold a Fly-Wheel operator's license."

Jean-Jean looked impatient. "So what? A Director is not required to operate Fly-Wheels."

"That's where you're wrong." Agar extracted an old, green-bound book from his desk drawer, and flipped it open. "I ran across this recently. Listen."

He read aloud: "Article 1382 of Budd-Jarvis Regulations of 2124; '*No person may hold an office higher than that of sub-chief unless he is the holder of a license to drive a Fly-Wheel, and furthermore possesses such skill in operation of said vehicle as to warrant a rating of .85-L Wullen or better from a competent board of examiners*'."

Jean-Jean's clear grey eyes met Agar's, and hastily he tried to tune out something that went beat-beat-beat under his ribs. "They made you Director anyway, didn't they?" said Jean-Jean. "Doesn't that mean that this old regulation no longer applies? After all, it's dated 2124, sixty years ago."

"No," said Agar. "It simply means that they've lost track of the regulation, and so didn't bother to check me for a Fly-Wheel license. I

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suppose that after Fly-Wheel operation became so easy and universal that everybody satisfied the requirement, the Board dropped examination on this point and the regulation passed into obscurity. However, I've looked into it, and it's still a legitimate company rule. An investigation would dredge it up, and you know how the Board abides by rules, and how nosey they are. That's why I can't back out now and risk arousing their disapproval and curiosity."

"All right, I see that. But they'll find you out at the exhibition anyway."

"NO, THEY won't," said Agar grimly. "The exhibition is a few weeks off, and by that time I intend to have my license. I'm taking lessons from my chauffeur; been doing so since I discovered Article 1382. Practice all the time. That's what I was doing when you walked in before; practicing parking."

"Oh! I wondered. I'm glad it was only that. How are you doing?"

"Well, I admit I'm having a little trouble. Can't seem to get the feel of it exactly. Never had any time for that kind of thing before. But I'll get it, Jean-Jean, see if I don't."

"Yes, but what about Ker-Kermit? How much does he know?"

"Ker-Kermit suspects that I am not a good pilot, and so is trying to embarrass me; but you may be sure he knows nothing about Article 1382. If he did, in the time it takes to buzz a Talkasee the Prime Executive Board would have had the information, and..."

The Talkasee buzzed. Jean-Jean answered, and switched the call to Agar. The slight frame of Pawl Pastin, Secretary of the Prime Executive Board appeared on the screen. "Good day," said Pastin in his dry, precise tones. "I understand that you wish to volunteer for the Betelgeusian exhibition. I hope this is correct?"

"Well...yes, it's correct."

"Good!" said Pastin, rubbing his hands together. "The Board is pleased. Although, we've put this on a voluntary basis, we're extremely desirous that our top executives participate. You understand that this is meant to secure the approval of the Betelgeusians, among whom it is a tradition that those who are highly placed should risk their lives in competition. But you've read about all this in the notice. Brave man, Alph Agar, brave man! Good luck!" Pastin clicked off.

AGAR SAT appalled. Brave man? What was this about risk of life? He hadn't read the notice, only glanced at the first couple of lines. "Jean-Jean!" he yelled; "hand me that notice!"

He read, with Jean-Jean following over his shoulder:

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"...competitive races and exhibitions of skill in the operation of Fly-Wheels to be held in honor of the Betelgeusians, since they are considering importing Fly-Wheels for use as their principal mode of transportation...would mean largest mass-order in Budd-Jarvis history...also top diplomatic importance to Earth Government in view of pending trade agreements...in accordance with Betelgeusian tradition, participant who makes poorest rating will be killed. BY ORDER OF THE PRIME EXECUTIVE BOARD..."

"Killed?" Jean-Jean's face looked worried.

"Must be a typographical error. What could they mean?" speculated Agar. "Spilled? Chilled? Billed? Filled? Get me Pawl Pastin again."

"Killed," said Pastin dryly, after they were connected. "Put to death. Executed. Deprived of life. I thought you understood that."

"THAT'S RIDICULOUS," snapped Agar. "Budd-Jarvis has no legal right to put anyone to death, nor has the Government. This is the Twenty-Second century, you know. Execution is not legal."

"Incorrect. Quote: Article 101,379, Budd-Jarvis Code: *'Any person in the employ of Budd-Jarvis holding office higher than that of Sub-Chief having signed the standard acceptance of the Budd-Jarvis Code, is subject to deprivation of life when continuance of said life constitutes a threat of .798 Bakli rating or better to the interests of the Company. Said rating to be verified by a board of Government Raters, and said deprivation to be performed with the permission of and under the supervision of the Government. Compensation to beneficiaries of the deceased to be made in the amount of fifty-thousand munits. Precedents: Dool Dooling case, 2085. Zeno Zerkel Case, 2096.'* Unquote.

"The continuance of the life of the loser of the forth-coming competition would cause disapproval among the Betelgeusians, and therefore constitute a threat to the interests of the Company. Is that clear?"

"The Government will never approve this!"

"The Government," said Pastin drily, "has rated the threat at .839 Bakli, and has therefore already approved it."

"In that case, I withdraw from the exhibition."

"I am sorry; you have volunteered of your own free will and been accepted. We cannot change that any more. The only way you can withdraw is to resign your Directorship."

"We'll see about that!" yelled Agar, and clicked off. "Get me Unit C4439 of the Information Bank of the Mas-

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ter Law and Policy Machine," he directed Jean-Jean.

THROUGH its fixed smile, C4439 said in its pleasantly human voice. "Data, please."

Agar gave the data.

"Point," said C4439. "B-J Code, Article 101,379 does so state. Point: Employee who has signed standard acceptance agreement of Code is legally bound by 101,379. Point: Government, however, rarely grants permission to execute. Point: Exception: Where execution is sufficiently to the public interest, Government grants permission. Point: This is now the case. Point: All agreements being binding, only way to withdraw from competition is to exercise the one right remaining: resignation of Directorship. End of points. Further data, please?"

"No further data!" Agar shouted.

"Thank you," smiled Unit C 4439. "I am disconnecting. May you dwell in happiness." The screen went blank.

"Now what fool put that expression into that robot!" raged Agar.

Jean-Jean was standing before him, worried. "Alph Agar, you must resign."

Alph Agar went to the window. The panorama spreading below him was the Unit: the huge, low buildings, the landscaped parks, the testing fields stretching to the horizon, the web of roads, the Fly-Wheels of all classes, rolling across the skies, rising and landing, spinning along the roads.

AGAR WATCHED the Fly-Wheels that had been all of his life up to now: the tremendous flat-rimmed wheel rotating about the stationery cylindrical cabin; the all-purpose vehicle that was equally at home in the air, on land, on water or under water. He knew every last detail of its construction, every principle and theory upon which it was founded. He knew, down to the ninth decimal place, the critical angular velocity which would take it off the vanes along its periphery on lift and velocity; the intricacies of its sealed atomic power plant that never needed attention and would outlast the vehicle itself.

He knew these things, he thought, but he couldn't operate a Fly-Wheel. Because of this; and because of Ker-Kermit, who wanted his job; and because of a quirk of circumstance, was he to relinquish everything that had given his existence meaning? No, thought Agar, not this easily, not without a struggle.

"I will not resign," he said to Jean-Jean. "I will acquire a license and enter that exhibition and do my best."

"And lose. Honestly, Alph-Agar, you're the most stubborn..." She was beginning

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to look angry. "How can you compete with people who are born pilots? You're not the pilot type, you know. You're stiff, you're methodical, you're deliberate. You don't know how to relax. In a Fly-Wheel, you have to let yourself go; you have to become part of it, move with it, feel with it, not sit in it like a passenger."

STIFF, THOUGHT Alph Agar. Mehodical. Deliberate. So this was Jean-Jean's picture of him. Hardly a romantic conception. Well, he supposed he was a fool to imagine she might someday come tenderly into his arms, her brisk manner turned soft for him, her ripe lips waiting for his, her body that was both girl's and woman's yielding for him, her... "Hrrrmph!" He cleared his throat and shook his head.

What was the matter with him? Where was his mental discipline? For a fleeting moment, he wondered what would happen if he simply followed his impulse and walked up to Jean-Jean and grasped her firmly; then the discipline took rigid hold. Impulses, he knew, should not be trusted. What, after all, would Jean-Jean want with a man like him?

"Alph Agar" said Jean-Jean again, "is the Directorship more important than your life?"

"The Directorship is my life."

She stared at him, her hazel eyes seeming to moisten and then narrow. "Yes. I suppose it is. I suppose it is. Oh, you boob!"

"Boob?"

"Archaic, twentieth century. Look it up."

"Wait a minute. Where are you going?"

"I'm taking the rest of the day off," said Jean-Jean tightly. "I'm going to see my boyfriend."

"Jean-Jean..." But she was gone.

FROM SEVERAL thousand feet above the ground, Alph Agar surveyed the view. Beautiful, he supposed, but frightening. Once he got up here, he could never quite escape the notion that man's natural place was on the ground. However, he thought, he wasn't doing too badly lately. His grip on the controls was firm. The Fly-Wheel was coursing along smoothly, maintaining a consistent level. He glanced at the man sitting beside him, his chauffeur, Kim Koom. "All right?"

Kim Koom licked his lips nervously. "All right, Alph Agar, but please don't look at me; don't let your attention wander from your piloting."

"Come, come, I've made some improvement, Koom. I might be allowed a little more freedom don't you think?"

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"The controls," said Koom. "Watch the controls."

Agar focused on his piloting again. Anyway, he thought, he was feeling a shade more confident. He had handled things pretty well, lately. Take the matter of that weasel, Ker Kermit. He had been icily distant to Kermit, but polite, not allowing the man to suspect that he was worried. And Jean-Jean; he had been pleasant but impersonal with her, restraining any hint of his feelings.

"All right," said Koom. "Land."

Absently, Agar headed the Fly-Wheel towards the secluded field behind his house. "No!" yelled Koom abruptly. "Not like that!"

THE CLOUDS above them began speeding down towards them, then receding even faster. The big wheel started a drunken wobble about the sky which changed into a wild, tilted dance. Spinning like a top, it went plummeting into the woods, levelling off at the tree tops, sending down showers of leaves and branches, frightening small animals, into scurrying panic; it scraped over a high, rocky ledge, hopped high one last time, and plowed deep furrows, finally rolling to a trembling halt.

Koom seemed shaken. He opened his mouth several times, producing only a gulp. Agar helped him out of the cabin, noticing that a young man who had been standing at the edge of the field was heading their way.

"Alph Agar," said Koom weakly. "I have had enough. I cannot instruct you any longer. My nerve is gone. I'm sorry."

"Look here, Kim Koom, I admit that landing wasn't perfect, but..."

"No," said Koom with finality, staggering off.

What was the use, thought Agar? If even Koom was giving him up... The young man was close now. With surprise, Agar recognized Lar Lerry, one of the Unit's crack pilots. What was he doing here?

"Zoops!" said Lerry. "What a landing!"

AGAR EYED him sternly. "Why aren't you at work?"

"Zoops!" repeated Lerry. "What a landing." He grinned. "Look, Alph Agar, I know all about it. Don't ask me how I know; I'm not supposed to tell, but I'm here to help you. Don't worry, your secret's safe with me. Now let's take her up again; I can teach you how to handle a Fly-Wheel if anybody can."

In the days that followed, Agar had to admit that Lerry was helping him. For the first time, his awkwardness at the controls seemed to be lessening. The Fly-Wheel was actually obeying him for more than five minutes at a time.

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When he wanted to soar, he soared. When he wanted to tilt, he tilted. When he wanted to roll along the ground, he rolled. He began to feel hope, real hope. Perhaps he might fool Ker-Kermit and Jean-Jean and come out of that exhibition alive, after all.

"You'll be taking your license qual pretty soon," Lerry told him. "Just a few more lessons. Then I'll show you how to make this rolly-polly sit up and beg."

But getting any other type of information out of Lerry was impossible. He wouldn't explain why he was helping Agar, or who might have put him up to it, or how he had discovered Agar's predicament. Agar spent hours in surmise, and always returned to the suspicion that this was Jean-Jean's doing. Was Lerry the boy-friend she kept mentioning? Was Jean-Jean doing this because she felt sorry for him? Pity wasn't what he wanted from her.

"DON'T BE silly, Alph Agar," Jean-Jean said, tossing her shining, coppery hair back, when he asked her point-blank. "Why should I try to help a man as stubborn as you are? In my opinion, you ought to resign right now. That's the only way to save your life. Suppose I call the Board?" She looked eager.

"Never mind." Jean-Jean turned away and began furiously talking at the Speak-a-Type, which rattled and stuttered as the type keys tried to keep up with her.

Still, Agar's confidence was rising, despite frequent periods of disquiet, as for example whenever he spoke to Ker Kermit. Kermit seemed a mine of unsettling information lately. "Old fellow," he would say, "have you heard how they intend to conduct the execution of the unfortunate loser? Not in decent privacy, but according to Betelgeusian custom, out on the field before all the spectators. They're going to chop the poor chap's head quite off with an axe. Barbarous, don't you think? Fortunately, I don't suppose either of us has anything to worry about." He would look at Agar blandly.

As the date of the exhibition drew nearer, Agar found it difficult to avoid thinking of that axe, but his increasing proficiency with the Fly-Wheel helped a lot. He was a long way from the effortless control that a good pilot had, but still he felt that he had a chance.

"One more hop," Lar Lerry said, "and then you'll take the license qual."

THE TAKE-off was good. Agar sent the Wheel rolling up towards the clouds as though it were climbing an easy hill. Levelling, he cruised for a while, approaching the

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Unit. It was a warming feeling, doing his own flying near the Unit instead of being chauffeured.

A line of Fly-Wheels from the Unit appeared dead ahead, crossing in front of him. Plenty of time to clear, thought Agar. Deliberately, he selected what he believed to be the elevation control and pulled it. The Wheel did not elevate, but tilted to a forty-five degree angle, still closing in fast on the other Fly-Wheels. Hastily, Agar did several other things, none of which he was entirely clear about afterwards.

The sound of the air stream changed into a hideous scream, and end-over-end, the Fly-Wheel flipped over the other vehicles; spun wildly; dropped earthwards and skimmed the ground, scattering a group of Unit employees. It headed for one of the buildings; swerved through the huge open window into the shop, paralyzing the workers in there, and shot out the opposite window taking the glass with it. It traced a perfect series of sine curves in the air; sheared off a flag pole; neatly clipped a line of hedges, darted about the testing fields like an insane horse fly; mounted towards the stratosphere until it was a scarcely-visible dot, and came whistling down at a fearful velocity, causing a nearby meteorological observatory to suspect the presence of a small meteorite. It levelled off just before smashing into the ground, chased itself around the field and came to a teetering halt.

A moment of shocked silence held the entire Unit motionless; then from all directions people began streaming towards the Fly-Wheel. Lar Lerry sat motionless in his seat, a dreamy look in his eyes, nodding his head slowly as though he had discovered some age-old secret.

A HUSKY foreman pounded on the door. "Come out of there, you miserable idiots. What kind of stuff are you... oh, it's you, Alph Agar. I beg your pardon, Alph Agar."

Agar descended from the Wheel, leading Lar Lerry, and found himself in the midst of a buzzing crowd. "It's quite all right," he said, and looked about at the curious, startled faces. "I...er...that is, well I was flying, merely flying. What is all the disturbance about?"

Ker Kermit pushed through the mob, smiling. "Oh, Director! A trifle wild, wouldn't you say? You aren't hurt, I hope?"

Jean-Jean appeared. "Alph Agar, for goodness sake!"

Lar Lerry came awake. He eyed Agar skittishly. "No," he said. "No more. I'm through." He spotted Jean-Jean. "Honey, I'm sorry, but I've had enough. I'd like to finish this job for you, but it's too risky. I give up."

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Agar stared at Jean-Jean and the world slowly grew dreary. Pity! Jean-Jean *had* influenced her boy-friend, Lar Lerry, to help him because she felt sorry for him. Pity! He didn't want it.

Well, he thought, it didn't matter anyway. He was through. He couldn't operate a Fly-Wheel and he'd never learn. He could feel the sharp edge of that axe slicing through his neck now. Unless he resigned.

"Alph Agar," said Jean-Jean. "Pawl Pastin called. He wants you to call him back." She didn't meet his eyes.

GLAD TO escape the crowd, Agar returned to the office, accompanied by a silent Jean-Jean, and part of the way by a lively Ker Kermit. He'd been deluding himself, Agar thought. He didn't have a chance. Should he give up the Directorship? To save his life, could he throw away everything he had worked for?

Frankly, thought Agar, he could. When the chips were down, he would react the same as anybody else to save his life, he realized. Life, after all, was worth more than a Directorship, it came to him. Whatever Pastin had in mind, he would hand in his resignation now.

But when Pastin appeared on the Talkassee screen, his first words staggered Agar. His dry, precise voice had a suggestion of asperity in it. "Good day. It has come to the attention of the board that in violation of Article 1382 you do not hold a Fly-Wheel operator's license. Is this correct?"

How had Pastin found out? Well, the decision was out of his hands now. In a way, it was a relief that it was over. "Yes, that is correct."

"Therefore it is necessary that you be dismissed from your Directorship, after the exhibition."

"Yes, of course, Pawl Pastin...did you say *after* the exhibition?"

"After the exhibition."

"But that's ridiculous! Why should I risk my life when I'm to be dismissed? I resign now!"

"Sorry. Whether you resign or are dismissed, it is now too late to withdraw. The list of participants has already been presented to the Betelgeusian delegation and cannot be altered. You must participate in the exhibition. If you wished to resign, you should have done so when you had the chance. Rules are rules, Alph Agar. This organization has become great through its policy of rigid adherence to rules. You should know that."

"I refuse to participate!" snapped Agar.

"In that case you will automatically receive low rating and will be executed."

"We'll see about that! Good day!"

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AGAR CALLED Unit C4439 of the Information Bank of the Master Law and Policy Machine and described the situation.

"Point," intoned Unit C4439, "it is true that list has been submitted. Point: Betelgeusian custom requires that low rating be given to any who withdraw. Execution must follow. Point: To be consistent with previous policy, Budd-Jarvis and Government must go along with Betelgeusian custom. Point: Your violation of Article 1382 now gives Budd-Jarvis option of dismissal date, as per Company Article 589,624.3. Point: Therefore Budd-Jarvis attitude in this matter is legal and correct. No appeal possible. End of points. Further data, please?"

"No further data."

"Thank you," smiled Unit C4439. "I am disconnecting. May you dwell in happiness."

"May you—oh, well, what's the use. Betelgeusian custom! Who's running this world anyway, the Terrans or the Betelgeusians?"

Heavily, Agar dropped into a chair.

He was finished.

Jean-Jean came to him. Her voice was throaty. "Oh, Alph..."

"What did you say?"

"I mean, oh Alph Agar, what are you going to do?"

"Never mind," said Agar dully. "Never mind. We have work to do. Let's get at it."

"But..."

"Never mind, I said."

They worked.

AFTER A while, Agar said through his teeth, "That Ker Kermit. He got me into this. Probably he informed on me too, although I don't know how he found out. If I weren't a civilized man..."

"Alph Agar," broke in Jean-Jean in a small voice, "it was I who informed the board that you were in violation of Article 1382."

"You?"

A tear escaped from under an eye-lash and trickled down her lovely cheek. "I...I thought he would fire you and you wouldn't have to compete. I really didn't think you had a chance, even with Lar Lerry teaching you."

"Yes," said Agar. "Lar Lerry. And now this. If by some wild chance I should escape with my life, I'd lose the Directorship anyway. Jean-Jean, why can't you mind your own business?"

She stiffened. "I was only trying to..."

"Yes," he said morosely. "I know. Take a letter."

"Why, oh why," muttered Jean-Jean, "did I have to fall in love with a jerk?"

There, thought Agar, was a woman for you. Despite all the trouble he was in now, she had to talk about her personal affairs. So easily, so lightly, she changed the subject. Was it Lar Lerry she

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was talking about? Severely, he repressed a pang.

"In love?" he questioned. "Who might you be in love with, Jean-Jean? And what is a jerk?"

She glared at him. "Who, never mind. 'Jerk', archaic, twentieth century, 'damn fool', 'jackass'. Let's have that letter."

THE WHOLE thing got out pretty fast, and the news travelled all over the Unit. Agar found himself treated with the respect and deference that might be accorded a corpse. His every order was followed with alacrity. He heard a rumor that the employees were taking up a collection for a tombstone. Whispers trailed him as he walked around the plant. "Poor guy...good Director...shame to lose him..." He began to wish for opposition, hostility, even disrespect, some sign that he was still alive and lusty. He acted high handed and arrogant at times. "Nerves are shot," he would overhear.

Ker Kermit's actions became increasingly obnoxious; his ever-present smile looked more and more like a laugh. He began to assume Agar's duties. Agar found that many of his executive directives were superfluous; Kermit had already taken care of them. His orders were countermanded by Kermit. Kermit's signature appeared on papers before he had a chance to look at them. Kermit began snooping around his private records. "After all, old fellow," Kermit would say, "you may as well acquaint me with things. One never knows what might happen, does one?"

The worst of it was that the Unit seemed to be accepting Kermit as the new Director. Alph Agar felt that he was already dead.

The day before the exhibition, Kermit walked into Agar's office with an interior decorator. "We'll move all this stuff out," he explained to the decorator. "Start from scratch. I'd like the walls a sort of aquamarine. I think in that corner we might have a kidney shaped lounge. As to the desks..."

Agar rose. About three steps, he thought. Three steps, and he could reach Kermit and wreck that alert, mocking face. He looked down at the white knuckles of his clenched fists. Why not? This man had deliberately planned to ruin and destroy him, although he couldn't prove that. A blind, animal rage began rising within him and Kermit's face seemed to enlarge and waver.

Horrified, he let his arms relax. What had he been thinking? What uncivilized passions were threatening to take charge? Where were the dignity and mental discipline that a Director should have?

"If you gentlemen don't

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mind," Agar said, "I'm very busy..."

FIFTEEN Fly-wheels waited before the crowded stands, pilots at the controls. In a special, roped off section sat the Betelgeusian Delegation, Budd-Jarvis officials and Government representatives. Elsewhere, the Board of Government Raters checked their instruments and sounded the warning chimes. The beehive drone of the crowd hushed.

Alph Agar desperately studied the printed instruction sheet that had been handed to each contestant.

The first instruction read: "At seven point nine miles per hour, roll between the yellow ground markers. Upset the last two markers by flipping the rear of your vehicle. Points will be deducted for failing to do so, or for upsetting any other markers."

The signal sounded. The competition was on.

Agar headed his Fly-Wheel between the markers. Nervously, he realized that he had barely an inch of clearance on each side. He slowed almost to a standstill as he entered the first two markers, noting that most of the other Fly-Wheels were already gliding smoothly through the course. Feeling that he was about to stall, he accelerated.

His Fly-Wheel shot ahead, knocked over all the markers except the last two, weaved through the other Fly-Wheels, skimmed the stands causing the crowds to duck and thudded to earth just in time to avoid annihilating the Betelgeusian Delegation, leaving the eight-eyed Betelgeusians blinking all their eyes and chirping hysterically.

"At six point eight feet altitude, traverse the field four times at 223 miles per hour, with Fly-Wheel vertical. Repeat, with Wheel horizontal. Repeat at twenty-two degree six minute angle in quadrant one, and two hundred degree angle in quadrant three."

GRIMLY, but hopelessly Agar essayed the next trial, and stared in amazement at his altimeter as he achieved six point eight in one smooth motion. He accelerated to exactly 223 miles per hour. Four times, he traversed the field, noting that he finished first.

Well! Perhaps he was getting the hang of this.

With a flourish, he set the control for horizontal position, and the Fly-Wheel went into a sickening spin, at such high velocity that it was almost invisible to the spectators. Agar blacked out.

He came to, to find his Fly-Wheel balanced on the topmost beam of the grand-stand, while thousands of faces stared up at him.

His attempt at the quadrant one test failed utterly.

His failure in quadran three was spectacular.

Grimly and doggedly, he plowed through the next two

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hours, aware that as the tests grew more difficult, his showing grew poorer; aware that the spectators were acquiring the habit of ducking nervously as he went into each test and that the eight-eyed Betelgeusians were focusing most of their eyes upon him.

When he reached the last test, he knew that it was all up. No use trying anymore. Indifferently, he manipulated the controls.

The Fly-Wheel shuddered and skidded, dropped to the ground, digging a large crater, jumped into the stands, causing a hasty exodus, took off and circled the stands at incredible speed with the sound of a titanic buzz-saw, dove at the Betelgeusian Delegation, hovering just above the flooring, forcing them to drop and crawl away, fled across the field in blurry sweeps and finally dug another crater in which it laid itself gently to rest.

Dismally, Agar plodded towards the benches and sat down to wait. Ker Kermit joined him. "Too bad, old fellow," he said, smiling.

Agar watched the Board of Raters checking their results. He waited through the endless speeches. The pit of his stomach felt very empty.

KNOWING that hope was futile, he hoped anyway as Pawl Pastin finally approached, but when he saw the look in Pastin's eyes, he straightened. "All right," he said, his voice firm. Must maintain the dignity of a Director to the last. "I'll go. Just don't touch me."

The axe-man was waiting, nervously swinging the polished axe. Incongruously, Agar felt sorry for him; the man had never done this before, he knew. He knelt, feeling the wooden block hard against his forehead. He closed his eyes, waiting in darkness for the blow, thinking now only of Jean-Jean, regretting that she would never know how much he cared.

There was a stir in the stands, and the blow did not come. Agar opened his eyes and saw that the axe-man had lowered his axe, and officials were rushing towards him.

They led him before the roped off section of the stands, where the Betelgeusians were chirping excitedly and waving their ropy limbs.

Pawl Pastin appeared. "The Betelgeusians seem to disagree with the Government Raters," he informed Agar.

The Betelgeusians fell silent and the official interpreter began to speak. "The Betelgeusians say," he explained in the loud tones of an announcer, "that they are shocked at our decision. They consider Alph Agar's performance the most remarkable and daring of the day. They consider him the winner, not the loser. They say that they cannot understand our method of rating and that

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it is their own custom to value highly the type of courage, audacity and imagination that Alph Agar has shown here to-day. They demand his release."

AN ANNOYED look appeared on Pawl Pastins face. "Highly irregular," he said. "That would be against the rules. The rules have already been laid down, and we must abide by them. We cannot make last minute changes. Tell the Betelgeusians that Alph Agar must be executed."

"Just a moment," interrupted a Government representative. "That would be defeating our purpose; both the Government and Budd-Jarvis want to please the Betelgeusians. I recommend that we go along with them."

"I fully understand that!" snapped Pawl Pastin. "And personally, I would prefer to free Alph Agar. Rules, however, take precedence over all other considerations. I have no authority to violate the rules."

"All right," said the Government man. "As Minister of Diplomacy, Sector Thirty-Six, empowered to represent the Government, I proclaim that Government sanction to this execution is withdrawn. You are directed to free Alph Agar."

"You are overlooking something. Your directive is in violation until confirmed by the Minister of Interior Policy, Sector Thirty-Seven, ratified by the Board of Industrial Relations, and recorded by the Office of Diplomatic Records. The execution must proceed!"

A fierce rebellion took hold of Agar. He had been resigned before, but now!...to be so close to life again and cheated by red tape! He opened his mouth...

A clear, feminine voice rang out from the edge of the knot of officials. It was Jean-Jean's. "As secretary and representative of Director Alph Agar, I have something to say! This situation is ridiculous. Since it is the Prime Executive Board that makes the rules, and all the members are present at this exhibition, why don't you simply call a meeting now, and reconsider the rules?"

Pawl Pastin looked startled. "Why yes," he said. "I hadn't thought of that. We can call an emergency meeting."

THE VOTE was immediately taken. "Because of a unanimous desire to satisfy the Betelgeusians," Pawl Pastin announced when the results were in, "the Board orders the release of Director Alph Agar."

Alph Agar felt soft, yielding curves hit him with a sweet pressure. Coppery hair was silky on his cheek and arms were around his neck. "Oh, Alph, Alph," Jean-Jean was whispering in his ear.

"Alph," said Agar indis-

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tinctly. "You're calling me Alph."

She drew back and looked at him with moist eyes. "Because I love you, you jerk. Since you won't tell me, I'll have to tell you. Do you love me?"

"Oh, Jean," said Alph. "Jean."

The interpreter's loud voice rapped out, "The Betelgeusians say that they are waiting to witness the execution!"

Heads jerked up. "What execution?" crackled Pastin.

"The execution of the loser. They say that now that Alph Agar has been released, a loser must be chosen."

Pastin frowned. It was clear that he was losing his patience. "Tell them," he said "that the Board of Government Raters has already turned in their tally. Agar was considered the loser. No alternative was provided. Ask them whom they believe to be the loser."

A chorus of chirping broke out amoung the Betelgeusians.

"They regard Assistant Director Ker Kermit as the loser. They consider his performance dull and routine. They found no imagination in it, only precision."

"Very well," said Pastin grimly. "We'll take a vote on it."

The Board was in conference longer this time, but finally Pastin announced: "Again we will yield to their wishes. Tell them that Ker Kermit shall be executed at once. Guards, lead him away!"

KERMIT'S face had turned sick. His confidence and drive had been shocked out of him. Spiritlessly, he allowed himself to be led toward the axe-man.

Getting what he deserved, thought Agar, but he felt no elation. Neither was he sorry for Kermit. There was something else... Anger. Something had been bothering him about this whole thing for a long time, and now a terrible rage was beginning to gather within him. At what? He wasn't sure exactly, but something was rotten here.

He started forward. He knew.

Mental discipline. He checked himself. Discipline. Dignity. Restraint. It was not fitting to give way to uncivilized emotion.

Hell! he thought with a final irritation. Oh, the hell with discipline and the hell with dignity!

He planted himself squarely before the Betelgeusian Delegation, hands on hips. "Tell them," he roared at the interpreter in a voice that he was unfamiliar with, "that we are a proud and peaceful people. Tell them that now, because they have been bending us to their will, we are about to deny our own hearts and do something shameful...the taking of human life for hope

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of gain. Tell them that up to now we have been weak!"

He raised his clenched fist and shook it at them. "And tell them this!" he shouted. "There will be no execution, and if they insist upon it, I will personally come up there and pound some respect into them, one at a time, or all at once!"

Tumult. Mad chirping. Pawl Pastin's white face stared at Agar. "What have you done, man?"

The interpreter's voice rose again: "The Betelgeusians say," he announced, "that once again they are impressed by the reckless audacity of Alph Agar. They say that they cannot resist arguments presented with such courage. They say that they admire a people that can produce a man like Alph Agar, that they will not insist upon the execution, and that they are ready to do business with both Budd-Jarvis and the Government."

ALPH AGAR sat in his office, holding Jean-Jean in his lap. He kissed her again.

There was a discreet tap at the door. After Jean-Jean straightened herself out, Agar called, "Come in."

Ker Kermit entered. "Pawl Pastin to see you," he announced respectfully. "Will you see him now, boss?"

"Certainly." Kermit left and Pastin entered and took a chair. His voice and manner were as dry as ever. "First, allow me to convey the gratitude of both Budd-Jarvs and the Government for your part in the Betelgeusian affair. Without the necessity of an execution, we've gained our ends, thanks to you. You will receive official recognition of this, very soon."

"Why," said Agar, "that's fine."

"However," continued Pastin, "the main purpose of this visit is to discharge you from the Directorship."

"What!"

PASTIN spread his hands. "But naturally. Rules are rules, you know. You are still in violation of Article 1382. I informed you that you would have to lose the Directorship after the exhibition."

"We'll see about that!" But it was without much hope that he put the call through to Unit C4439 and gave the data.

"Point," smiled Unit C4439. "Since you were allowed to compete in the exhibition, it must be considered that Government sanction to operate a Fly-Wheel existed. Point: Government sanction under such circumstances is by License Division Article 14986.39 equivalent to a permanent license of rating .90-L Wullen. End of points. Further data, please?"

"No further data."

"Thank you," smiled Unit C4439. "I am disconnecting. May you dwell in happiness."

"I was wrong," admitted

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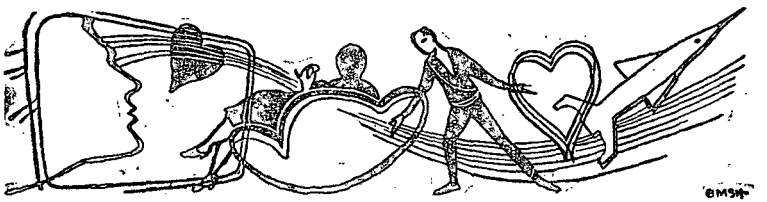
Pastin, rising to go. "By the rules, you retain your Directorship." At the door he turned and permitted himself a microscopic smile. "However, I am not quite so obtuse as you may think me. May you dwell in happiness."



A Department For The
Science - Fictionist

INSIDE SCIENCE FICTION

Reports and Reminiscences

By Robert A. Madle

THE FIRST *WORLD* SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION

SCIENCE fiction conventions have been termed "world" conventions dating back to the first one, in 1939. However, with the exception of Toronto, in 1948, all have been held in USA; and the Toronto affair was limited to attendees from the North American continent. 1958's convention, however, can certainly be called a "world" convention for it was held in London, England, with representation from many parts of the world.

Chairman John "Ted" Carnell travelled to the New York convention last year with the express purpose of obtaining the convention of 1958 for London. He succeed-

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HAUNTED CENTENNIAL

Feature Novelet

by Wallace West

illustrated by MURPHY

Trans-Planetary Spaceways, Inc., had a franchise coming up for renewal, and the only hope Fredda Reynolds had for it was getting what is known as the "spotlight of favorable public opinion" on the company. A bang-up centennial show would do it—only, how could the first moon-flight be re-enacted without dragging out the skeleton in Trans-Planetary's closet? How could they get around the scandalous betrayal of Colonel Kane by Fredda's grandfather?

THE PUBLIC RELATIONS Director Ben Hogan said, "Centennials, have become a dime a dozen. Josiah Wedgwood & Sons, Inc., celebrated its *tri*-centennial ten years ago. Better forget the whole thing."

"But our centennial will be different," protested Fredda Reynolds, grand-daughter of the founder of Trans-Planetary Spaceways, Inc.; its president; and, by grace of fast footwork, still its majority stockholder.

"Each company thinks its

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Fredda's "confession" was a histrionic masterpiece...

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own celebration will be a worldbeater."

"Ours *has* to be!" She looked at him out of slitted grey eyes that gave her handsome face a hawk's cruelty. "Our 99-year franchise comes up for renewal next July. To maintain our monopoly we've got to 'draw the spotlight of favorable public opinion in our direction', as the PR textbooks put it."

"O.K. O.K. So let's talk budget."

"The regular budget for 2069 should..."

"Look, Fredda, this is the age of space travel. Back when the first American companies began having 100th birthdays, they could attract mobs with tent shows. Then the B. & O., and Erie Railroads went big time with elaborate pageants, exhibitions, and buttons for the President to push.

"Yokels are no dopes; after that, every centennial had to cost more and be more spectacular or the public refused to be spellbound. When the aviation industry celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Wright Brothers flight at Kitty Hawk, Pan-World Airways alone had to spend five million bucks on a round-the-earth race to put it across. I'll need at least that much, and a lot better idea, to keep Trans-Plan from laying an egg."

HOGAN FELT tension rising in the office and wondered whether he dared chance an extra smoke as a buffer. He reached for his cigaret case with its built-in cancer dosimeter, then forgot it in admiration for the dashing figure Fredda cut as she flew into one of her carefully controlled rages.

"*Mister* Hogan!" She pressed slim fingers against the cactiwood desk top as though preparing to hurdle it. "Such a budget is out of the question. As for an idea—if I *must* tell you your business again—there's the best one a PR man could ask for lying under your pug nose."

"I know, Fredda; I know." He decided on the cigaret, and to hell with the dosimeter reading. "It's a perfectly jolly idea!" He lighted up. "We'll reenact the voyage of the *Mayflower*, with Henry Clay riding on that first Erie flat car in the prow."

"Talk sense!" The hard lines around her fine mouth relaxed just a trifle.

"We'll do the obvious... reenact Col. Kane's pioneer trip around the Moon in '69." He savored her discomforture, then twisted the barb. "It'll cost you millions to build a working replica of the old *Moonraker*."

"Who said anything about a replica?" She was grinning like a child at the prospect of *his* discomforture. "We'll use the original ship."

"That piece of corroded

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junk at Kane Memorial Park?" He *was* shocked.

"Why not?" She leaned forward, chin on clasped hands, to watch him wriggle.

"Because it's haun...because you won't find a pilot from here to Ganymede who'll consent to fly that unshielded, prehistoric job."

"Right the first time, Ben. The *Moonraker* is haunted. Because it is, Trans-Plan also has been ghost-ridden for three generations...held up to scorn as the outfit that sent its first space ship up without shielding, to save a few hundred thousand dollars. People haven't quite trusted us ever since."

"Our centennial's going to lay a ghost, Ben, not an egg!" Suddenly those slatey eyes blazed. "Well, what you waiting for? That's an order. Hump!"

"WHAT'S IN file on Col. Kane, Piercey?" Hogan called as he slammed disgustedly into his plush office.

"Not much," the little blonde secretary snipped after a 30-minute search. "Thomas Wellington Kane... Good lookin'." She held up a faded news photo. "Born Brooklyn, June 22, 1939... Poor, and therefore honest, parents... Worked way to an M.I.T. doctorate in physics by playing bit parts and character roles on radio and TV... Jet pilot and Air Force Colonel, thanks to World War III.... After the stand-off agreement with Russia, was signed by Fredric Reynolds to pilot the *Moonraker* for the princely sum of one G."

"No lese majeste," Hogan frowned. "The colonel signed on for the pure love of adventure, shall we say?"

"We shall say, boss.... He brought the *Moonraker* back, somehow, but ditched her in the ocean. A fishing boat found everybody on board her both blind and raving crazy from cosmic ray exposure. The other members of the crew died, but Kane partially recovered... Reynolds seems to have had a bad conscience because..."

"Editorializing again?"

"...because, when Kane got out of the hospital at last. Reynolds found him a job as pilot of the New York-Paris passenger jet run.... A year of that rat race, and the poor guy's heart and eyes went back on him again." She sighed and stared moodily at a map of the Solar System that covered one wall of the room.

"Go on."

"Kane made a comeback during the war with Mars.... Was drafted to a desk job as radio news censor... Managed to crack the Martian code, and, as a result, the Martie Fifth Column on Earth... As a reward, was given a big hand in negotiat-

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ing the peace treaty and setting up United Stars."

"Wow! I'd forgotten most of this." Ben was almost licking his chops. "Real cloak and dagger stuff. The tri-di boys will eat it up."

"AND LISTEN to this: ... Was offered handsome pensions by both United Stars *and* Trans-Planetary ...Refused them....Instead, took a sort of watchdog job at Moon Base where the low gravity babied his heart. Years later, when everyone had almost forgotten him, Kane, with the help of his daughter and her Space Patrol Captain husband, exposed, and finally smashed, the last Big Shot colonial revolt on Venus....What a guy!" Her blue eyes grew misty.

"Any more on him?"

"A very little." She cracked her gum excitedly. "Right after that, Kane, and his daughter and son-in-law disappeared."

"What?" Hogan returned his cigaret case to his pocket after a glance showed the dosimeter still in the red.

"Yep. Says here: 'The trio is believed to have been kidnaped during.'"

"During what, woman?"

"Just 'during'. Last page of this rundown has been torn off and lost...or something'."

"Nice work so far, Piercey." He patted her slim hip casually as she rose. "Try to locate those missing pages. We'll need ever scrap of information to do a snow job on the colonel....Hey, Bill!"

"Yes *sir!*" A lanky, sandy-haired youth rambled in as Piercey tripped out.

"Set up a brainstorm for after lunch. We've got to whip out a checklist of centennial ideas."

"Oh, nooo!" Bill pantomimed tearing his hair as he ambled out.

HOGAN HAD revived the brainstorming technique in a desperate search for ideas that would satisfy Fredda's lust for profits. Usually the staff employed such sessions to poke fun at their superiors, or to let their collective ids toss submerged nonsense into consciousness. Nevertheless, the wackiest of all the ideas proposed—to build a glass-domed hotel on frozen Ganymede, where tourists with more money than brains could watch Jupiter's Red Spot boil—had paid handsome dividends in both publicity and cash.

This afternoon's session was no exception. Staffers suggested such obvious impossibilities as that Copernicus be renamed Kane Crater, with appropriate ceremonies; that Fredda marry the actor who would play the colonel's role in a proposed pageant; and that Trans-Plan donate its centennial year profits to

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finance development of a practical interstellar drive. After everyone else had exhausted his or her imaginative powers, Miss Pierce came up with the payoff.

"Why not..." She flapped long artificial eyelashes. "Why not bring the dastardly kidnapers of Col. Kane to justice?"

"They're dead," Hogan groaned.

Bill banged a bell to indicate that his boss had used a "killer phrase".

"Not necessarily," the secretary insisted. "Back in the Gray Nineties kidnapers usually were hopped-up kids. And, *these* days, lots of folks live well past the century mark.

"Say the kidnapers were 'teen age incors. They'll still be only in their late eighties or early nineties. Can't you just see 'em? Living on their ill-gotten gains. Respected great-grandfathers behind long white beards. And then....." She suited action to word so convincingly that Mollie, the timid little file clerk, squealed. "Then we pounce!"

"I think I need..." Ben lurched to his feet. "In fact I think we all need a stiff drink. Close the office, Bill; it's almost three o'clock anyway. Come along, Piercey. Your drink's on me."

"YOUR WILD idea may have something in it," he told the girl as they sipped syn and tonic at a corner bar. When she wriggled, he wondered idly if she really was crazy about him, or was just polishing the brass. He'd have to find out one of these days when he had a free weekend... If only she weren't so frightfully young, and didn't have that awful bridge of freckles across her snub nose!

"Thank you, Mr. Hogan," she answered demurely. "I spent the rest of this morning scanning old news microfilms, you know." (*What is the big goof made of?* she was thinking. *Ice? Six weeks as his secretary and not a real pass made.* Even Mollie had started remarking about it.)

"Find anything hot?"

"I'm not sure." She chewed delicately at a crimson finger nail. "Or rather, maybe it's too hot. That's why I didn't mention it before the others."

"Tell Brother Ben." With a shudder he rescued her hand from its punishment.

"Well, '98 was the year, you remember, when the Supreme Court ruled that all privately-owned, and nationally-owned enterprises must be franchised as public utilities by United Stars."

"Um," he nodded. "The Court held that unregulated cutthroat competition among nations, companies, and industries was the big cause of wars that had convulsed

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Earth since 1912, and lately had spread to the planets. Tell on."

"Well, Mars didn't object, because that planet is an anarchiate. And Earth went along because its resources were almost exhausted, and its people were starving on account of endless wars..."

"But the rugged individualists on Venus raised holy hell. Right?"

"Aw, you know the whole story already!" Her pert face fell.

"Just pieces of it. Let's see, the Shots were supposed to have developed a ship with a real interstellar drive, weren't they, and they were planning to bust Trans-Planetary's monopoly with her?"

"Supposed to? They really had such a ship, according to micromags I scanned. Fusion-photon drive... Constant one-G acceleration... Speed mighty close to that of light."

"SO OLD FRED REYNOLDS convinced United Stars that the Shots were planning a new war," Hogan picked up the story. "Whereupon the Marines landed...or rather, the Space Patrol took over the star ship and brought her to White Sands. And there she blew herself to smithereens."

"No!" Piercey's eyes were dancing with excitement of a sudden. "You won't find this in the history books, Mr. Hogan, but the micromags say Fredric Reynolds moved heaven and earth to get control of that ship. Every Congressman in New Washington was presented with two flying Caddies. But the public caught on, and raised such a rumpus that the deal was about to fall through when..."

"When the star ship blew."

"Will you stop interrupting! The official story is that she exploded, but just look at this that I found...and couldn't I use a flying Caddy myself, maybe?" She spread out a yellow, tattered copy of one of the last *Kiplinger Letters*. Dated Sept. 20, 1998, it read:

> We hear from White Sands that there is considerable speculation to the effect that destruction of the Venusian star ship was an *ex post facto fait accompli*. Eyewitnesses —who refuse to give their names— insist that, on the night of the big blow, the ship took off an hour before the explosion occurred.

"Nuts," said Hogan, looking at the little secretary with new respect.

"Think so?" She actually winked at him. "Well, I mayn't be a Sherlock, but I've drawn four alternative deductions; and none of them make Trans-Plan look pretty."

"O.K., little girl," he yawned extravagantly. "You've had your drink. Now run along home and play with your little green dolls."

"While you have it out with Fredda?" She wrinkled her nose. "All right. But don't forget my Caddy, boss.

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I'll keep the Kiplinger, just in case you should."

"THAT FILLY knows too much; fire her," Fredda commanded.

"And have her galloping down to New Washington with that letter? Wonder where she found it; I'd have sworn every copy was destroyed. No, I'll buy her the plane instead."

"Hmmm." Fredda dilated a window and stared out through the towers of Manhattan in the direction of haze-hidden Reynolds Spaceport. "You're right, for a change. What, by the way, were those deductions the child made?"

"The first one," he lied, "was that your grandfather really did have the star ship blown up, so Trans-Plan's hydrazine jobs would have no competition. The second was that he stole the ship and that you still have her orbiting around some planetoid, as an ace in the hole in case the U. S. gets tough about franchise renewal.

"The third is that he stole her and sent her on a journey of exploration, during which she cracked up. Finally, there's the possibility that some of the Shots managed to snatch her and the Kanes, and hightail it out of the System."

"Not bad for a kid, Ben; not bad." Fredda reached under her desk for a bottle, filled two shot glasses, and spun one across to him. "But there' still a fifth deduction: Col. Thomas Wellington Kane, with the help of his daughter and her husband, hijacked that ship. The Space Patrol couldn't let that get out, particularly when they learned that granddad had planned to snatch it an hour later; so they blew up an old hulk to cover the disappearance. That one happens to be true, but don't quote me."

Ben sipped with extreme care to avoid choking on his whiskey. "There goes the old centennial," he managed to say at last.

"Why?" Her face chilled. "Kane was never heard from again. The ship cracked up, or got lost and has been a floating coffin among the stars for 70 years."

"WAIT A MINUTE, Fredda." Hogan scratched his tiny bald spot while he sorted scraps of college physics. "Einstein argued that if a ship travelled close to the speed of light, time would shrink for its crew members. Say it takes 70 years, Earth time, to make a trip to some star at that speed. When the crewmen get home, they're only a few months older than when they started."

"Garbage," she said, refilling their glasses. "But let's say, for the sake of argument,

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that old Al was right. Kane was born in 1939 and disappeared in '98. He's Out There somewhere, and still only about 60 years old. He comes home to celebrate his centennial like Huck Finn did to attend his funeral... I hope I don't have to tell you how to cash in on such a windfall."

"But he could tell United Stars some unpleasant truths, boss."

"Could he? In the first place, he's a mighty sick man; it probably would kill him to testify at a long investigation. In the second place, he's just as dead, in the eyes of the law, as my grandfather is. I doubt if he'd be allowed to testify in court. If he did, would he sound silly? The dead accusing the dead! Finally, if I had to, I'd put the pressure on to get him indicted as a thief, income tax dodger and traitor. No, Ben; if your million-to-one shot comes home, he'll eat right out of my hand.

"And speaking of eating: I'm starved. Let's have dinner at Ciro's and then you come out to the ranch for a lazy weekend.

"That would be nice, Fredda," he said meekly but with an inward sigh.

II

BACK IN his office on Tuesday, Ben studied the bags under his eyes, rubbed his aching back and wondered whether a three-days-a-week, 100-G job was worth what it took to keep Fredda happy.

"Bill!" he snarled.

"Yes *sir!*"

"I'm going out to Kane Park to look at the rust bucket. You'd better start outlining some kind of dramatic script for the Moon trip reenactment... We only have three months to get this centennial on the road. Also, check the talent agencies, and see if they can come up with a 30-year-old capable of looking and acting like Kane, and who doesn't get space sick.

"*Yes* sir."

"Then check with Engineering at the field. Find out whether it's possible to install shielding on the *Moonraker* that will be light enough to let her reach an orbit. And don't say 'Yes *sir!*' again or I'll sock you."

"*Yes* sir."

"Piercey!"

"Here." She was wearing a new and much more subdued dress, with nicely matching accessories, he noted. And she wasn't chewing gum!

"Call the limousine. You're driving me out to Kane Park."

"Have a nice weekend?" she inquired as the company helicopter skimmed along on automatic.

"Humph!"

"Really? Why is it, Ben..." (First time she had

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ever used his first name, he noted with concern.) "Why is it that Miss Reynolds has never married? You'd think..."

"No I wouldn't... What more did you learn about Kane over your weekend?"

"Not much. Spent most of my time conferring with the Caddy interior decorators about colors and upholstery."

"PIERCEY," he said gravely, "you're getting too big for your britches."

"Never wear any," she mocked him.

"Fredda told me to fire you."

"But you talked her out of it. Ah always knowed you wouldn't beat po' li'l Topsy, Mistah Legree."

"All right, joke about it." He stuffed his hands in his pockets when they showed a tendency to wring her pretty neck. "But don't tangle with Fredda; if you do they'll be picking up your pieces from here to Callisto."

"Whose pieces?" She took the heli off the traffic beam and landed it neatly on the grassy plot where the Moonraker pointed a battered nose at the sky. "And, as for the Caddy, if I haven't earned it yet, I will have by the time this screwy centennial is over. While we're at it, here's one more thing: 'Piercey' I don't like."

"As you say, my dear Miss Pierce." He handed her to lot's chair.

the ground like a gentleman of the old school. "Now what do you suggest we do to salvage this wreck?"

"'If forty maids with forty mops'...no, with 40 sandblasters...'polished her for half a year' she might look good."

"'"I doubt it" said the carpenter'" Hogan quoted, falling in with her pixie mood. "Let's go inside."

OLD LEW CARRUTHERS, the caretaker, appeared at the ship's one hatch when he heard their steps on the shaky ramp. Carruthers had been an alternate engineer of the original crew. The disappointment of not having gone on that fatal trip filled him with such fury against fate that it must have preserved him. At the age of 120, he was still as full of fire as a smoked red pepper.

"Well, if it ain't Propaganda Minister Hogan," the old man chirped as he stuck out a claw. "But who's the pin-up?" When introductions were complete he managed a passable wolf whistle. "Pity I'm not a year or two younger. Heh. Heh. Heh. Come in folks, if you can get in."

They inched their way up a crawl hole and finally emerged in the control room.

"Don't you find climbing that ladder hard work, Mr. Carruthers?" the girl puffed as she sank into the co-pi-

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"Been doing it nigh on a century; sometimes ten-twenty times a day when there's a lot of visitors. Used to it, I guess... Or maybe the Colonel and the other boys give me a boost up and down."

"Fredda wants this ship flown around the Moon again as part of our centennial," Hogan said. "Could she make it?"

"Oh, sure... I mean..." Craft glittered in those ancient eyes. "I mean, she could make it if I went along to nurse her rockets. I've kept 'em tuned up, you know, just in case. You *will* send me along this time, won't you? That way, I could pretend like I really...really..." He blinked.

"Wonderful publicity stunt," Ben agreed. "'Original Lifetime Ambition'. Think your heart could stand the acceleration?"

"Heart?" Carruthers actually jumped. "Ain't nothin' wrong with *my* heart. And if there was, I wouldn't give a damn; I just want to take her 'round the Moon."

"What about shielding?"

"Yeah!" Carruthers seemed to crumble in on himself. "What about it?"

"Engineering has developed some lighter stuff, hasn't it?"

"Not light enough, Mr. Hogan. The colonel trimmed weight to the last ounce before he could get her up the first time. Thats why Adams went as engineer 'stead of me; he sweated off a pound more than I could. You can't shield the *Moonraker* and still make her fly that far." He looked at them disconsolately.

"GOOD NEWS from Engineering," Bill reported that afternoon. "Seems they've developed a force field...sort of like the thing that keeps heat away from the walls of atomic fusion furnaces. This'n makes cosmic rays shy away. The generator weighs about a hundred pounds. Only trouble is..."

"It sounded too good to be true," sighed Hogan, thinking of all the profitable passenger and freight space that could be saved by such a device.

"Only trouble is that the spacers and their union refuse to have anything to do with the gadget...sort of like the old clipper ship sailors who wouldn't be caught dead on a vessel made of iron. The men insist on several inches of good heavy lead, or lead glass, between them and Outside."

"Hasn't it even been test-flown, Bill?"

"It has been tested. And that's the third strike against it. Larry Dangerfield took it up for Fredda about six months ago, because he was sweet on her. The shield worked fine for an hour. Then it conked out because, of all things, an ant crawled

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between two wires and caused a short. Larry's still in the hospital. May lose his sight."

"Ouch! Guess we'll forget the *Moonraker* and settle for a series of tri-di dramas about Kane, a pictorial history of Trans-Plan, and a bangup Miss Spaceways contest."

FREDDA guessed otherwise. "Ben," she stormed, "I can think of only one outstanding reason for keeping you around here. Otherwise you're a dead loss." She shook her aristocratic, hennaed head sadly. "Well, let me try again: Trans-Planetary's position has always been that the *Moonraker* was adequately shielded, if its crew members had taken ordinary precautions. Granddad insisted that they ruined their eyes, and addled their brains, by ignoring instructions and staring out of the ports at the Moon and stars. Shielding on those ports, he admitted, could have been better."

"You know that's a lie, Fredda. The *Moonraker* was a seive."

"How do I know it? *Moonraker* never made a second trip. But, ever since her first one, Trans-Plan ships have had to drag untold tons of deadweight around.

"So we send her up again. Officially, we put thick lead glass in her portholes; on the quiet, we slip our new force field generator into the engine room. So everybody comes back fiddle fit. So the heat is turned off us... How'd you like to hire me as a PR man, Benjie?"

"It would be a waste of your greatest talent," he grinned as he bent over the desk and kissed her. "But there are bugs. The first is: Where do we get a crew for the wreck?"

"That's a detail. Shanghai one for all I care."

"The second bug is: If you get away with this, you make Col. Kane and his crew look like damned fools. Think you ought to rewrite history?"

"To get the franchise renewed, I'd prove that Grandfather Reynolds was a body snatcher... Now run along, and don't bother me until Thursday afternoon."

HOGAN GAVE his staff one of its rare workouts during the next few weeks. Miss Pierce, Bill, Mollie, and their live and servo assistants waded through miles of microfilm in search of local color and human interest items. They prepared a Fact Sheet—containing a modicum of facts—about centennial plans, and sent it to news services, ad agencies, shipbuilders, parts and fuel suppliers, astronomical societies, science fiction groups, and others who possibly might be enticed to tie-in with Trans-Plan's celebration at no cost to the latter.

Ben practically lived on

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the visiphone as he organized a "front committee" of big names in industry and government who could take some of the taint of commercialism off the venture. He scored a personal triumph by inveigling Orville Wright, 5th, a former member of the United Stars Council, to be chairman.

Bill being deep in dictation of the pageant script, Ben then took over the job of rounding up a cast. The agencies he consulted agreed that finding an actor to play Kane should offer no great difficulty, if the pay were high. But he ran into a snag when he went out to the field and asked Flight Superintendent Evans to locate a competent pilot who would be willing to take the role of co-pilot in the reenactment.

"I'd really like to help, Mr. Hogan," the Welshman said at the bar to which they repaired. "I know what this means to Miss Reynolds and to all of us. But I'll quit before I order any of my boys into that rattletrap."

"Don't you think the ship can make another trip?"

"Oh, I have a dozen men who could get her around the Moon and back if you install the force field generator. But they won't! It's tradition, you see. They look on Kane, not Reynolds, as founder of Trans-Planetary; they object to his memory being dug out of oblivion to save the bacon of someone whose granddaddy kicked Kane in the pants. Can't say I blame them."

"You must know of *someone* who can be had," the PR man pleaded. "Someone who's been beached for drinking, say. Someone who wants to get back into space the worst way."

Evans studied his beer.

"Just one," he said at last. "Tommy Thompson got out got out of Marsport prison last month after serving a year for trying to elope with a flying girl. It's strict company policy not to hire anybody who offends the touchy Marties. If you could fjx it, I think....Tommy's mighty touchy, too, but at least he's a damned good pilot."

"Get him down here quick, then."

"O.K. It's your funeral. Try to keep him off the booze as much as you can."

AGENCIES started sending Col. Kane possibilities over on a Tuesday morning in late May. Hogan, fighting the letdown that always followed weekends at the Reynolds ranch, turned over the preliminary interviews to his secretary. He was deep in slumber three hours later when his office door slammed.

"I quit," Miss Pierce snarled as she slapped his feet off the desk and perched where they had rest-

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ed. "Interview your own creeps."

"What's all this?" he yawned.

"I talked to five hams who want to play Kane like Hamlet in modern dress. One male impersonator...two pansies ...one codger who says he *is* Kane. (He brought along an old pilot's license to prove it!)... And Kane's illegitimate grandson... Yah!"

Her tirade was interrupted by a knock on the door.

"Come on in," Ben called, then stared openmouthed as the door opened. Col. Kane himself, dressed in the old-fashioned pressure suit he had worn in newsreel shots taken just before the Moonraker lifted, stood in the entrance.

"Looking for me, Mr. Hogan?" he said gently in that well-remembered baritone.

"Ulp!" Ben scrambled to his feet; grabbed for his cigarets; couldn't get at them because Miss Pierce was clinging to his hand. "C-colonel!" he stuttered, "you...you did get to the stars and back!"

"Sorry. I wish I had." The man smiled warmly and came forward, hand outstretched. "Globe sent me over. I thought this would be the best form of approach. Gilbert Harrison, at your service. Here's my card." And now he was the system-famous tri-di star, accepting homage from his fans.

"Gil Harrison!" Piercey's words were a prayer. "The man who starred as Charlie Chaplin last week...and as Henry VIII the week before. Oh, Ben!"

"You've got the job, Mr. Harrison," said the PR man.

"I thought I might." The actor smiled without conceit. "My honorarium will be fifty thousand dollars a week, plus a million in life insurance."

"Now wait a minute," Ben exploded. "We can't..."

Piercey's heel almost excised his little toe.

"I'll consult Miss Reynolds," he gasped, trying to stifle his agony.

"Ah yes. These women." Harrison flickered an eyelid in the girl's direction. "You may reach me at my lodge in the Adirondacks until Thursday. Good day."

And, as he marched away, swinging his crash helmet, he was Col. Kane again, the dashing, devil-may-care jet pilot and spacer-to-be."

"LOVE THAT man!" whispered Piercey, her eyes misty. "I would have sworn..."

"*Miss* Pierce," snapped Hogan. "What in blazes is your first name?"

"Juliet!" she whispered.

"Come off it! After that performance I refuse to keep calling you 'Miss'."

"Name's Friday." She glared at him. "Mom named me that 'cause she thought

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being a secretary should be a girl's highest ambition. She was wrong! Want to make something of it?"

"Relax! Tell me what you know about Gil Harrison. I'm not up on tri-di gossip, I'm afraid."

"Man of mystery," she crooned. "Greatest lover since Valentino. Can play anything, even the hunchback of Notre Dame. Said to be worth close to a...oh, some fabulous sum. Has Wall Street at his feet. Sportsman...

"That enough, Miss... Friday. We're in! Tell Bill to see me whenever the muse lets him up off the mat."

"That's fine," Bill yawned after he had collapsed in Ben's easiest chair and heard the results of the Evans and Harrison interviews. "Gil's a natural, of course. And everybody has read of Tommy's tragic feathery romance, so I'll write a chin-up, self-sacrificing part for him. We'll jerk the tears with Carruthers." Bill transferred his weight to his sixth vertebra. "It's all pretty vague yet. I still need a comic. He can be the *Moonraker's* official photographer... He knows enough about light to understand that the ports are places to stay away from, see. But he *has* to take pictures. He resorts to all sorts of dodges to avoid being burned. Say!" Bill sat up with a jerk that almost dislocated his neck. "This is the biggest thing I've got my teeth into since I left STDC's Script Department. This is BIG. The others think the little photographer is scared to death, see, and they..."

"Go away, ghoul," Hogan groaned. "I'm the one who's scared to death. I have to go now, and beard Fredda in her den.

EAGLES screamed as they always did when being pried out of Fredda's fingers, but she eventually consented to hire Harrison. Hogan celebrated his moral victory over the boss by taking Friday to dinner that night. His festive mood lasted only until he called the actor's lodge.

Instead of the star, a servo answered in its detached monotone.

"Ah yes, Mr. Hogan," it said. "Since talking to you, my master has learned that your reenactment will blacken the character of Col Kane. An actor as great as Gilbert Harrison can take no part in such a vile conspiracy. Good night!"

"Now where could he have heard that?" Ben stared at his secretary.

"A dozen places, silly; it's all over town. Every male man's hand is against Fredda Reynolds, the lone wolfess. Maybe he heard it at Pan-World Airways, which has been trying for years to break

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into the space travel racket; maybe someone over there offered him a juicy 52-week contract."

"What do we do now?" He smeared a streak across the table with the bottom of his syntini glass.

"Thanks for taking me into the firm... Why, one of those hams I interviewed wasn't too *awful* bad." She sucked her cheeks in thoughtfully. "He has the right voice, and he could be made up to look like Kane. Trouble is that, while the colonel was a tough old war veteran of 31, this kid's still wet behind the ears...only about 20, I'd judge."

"Are you still wet behind the ears?"

"Girls are different."

"Think we should give Wet Ears a whirl?"

"Why not. We can hire him for peanuts, which will make Fredda be extra nice to you next weekend. We'll send him out to talk with Carruthers. If he's any kind of trouper he should be able to get the swing of the role."

"You're a good girl," he sighed with relief.

"It's just that the competition's too tough around here."

BEN LOOKED up from Kane's solidophoto on the desktop to the boy who sat facing him. There was only a general resemblance. The kid's facial planes were much softer, of course. There were no lines around the eyes such as a jet pilot gets from staring long into the face of death, but a good makeup man could fix that. The eyes were blue and steady in both cases.

"Get up, please," Ben said. "Walk around a bit."

In action, the boy came much closer to the Kane of the newsreels...the same shape of the head to the right ...the same slight limp from a war wound.

"You've studied your man, all right, Mr. Tolliver," he said. (Tolliver, Schmolliver! Well, thespians had their strange ways.) "Have you had much acting experience.

"Not too much, sir." (Wet Ears really had an excellent voice that belied his youth.) "I've played quite a few juveniles on the networks. Even had a 13-week contract last year, but it..."

"You understand that this is a dangerous as well as an important role."

"I do, sir." (That quirk of the lips was pure Kane.)

"I'm afraid it won't pay very much. You see, for authenticity's sake we want to pay the same sum—one thousand dollars—that the colonel received for the original flight." (Why had nobody ever written a story about the official who handed over to Judas only 40 of the original 80 pieces of silver?)

"That is quite natural, sir." (Again that quirk.)

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"But if you put the role over, your reputation will be made."

"I understand."

"Ever make a trip on a space ship?"

"Yes sir; I won't get sick, if that's what you're thinking of."

"Good. You're hired. And here are two more things: After this, call me Ben, and I'll call you Frank. O.K.? And between now and curtain time you're to spend every hour you can at Kane Park talking to Lew Carruthers."

"Talking *to* Carruthers?" Tolliver started to chuckle but caught himself. "A wonderful idea, Ben. I'll *be* Col. Kane in no time, that way."

"Splendid." Ben pushed a contract across the desk. "Just sign here, Frank. And, uh, you may draw on me, personally, for anything up to $100 a week for expense money while you're studying the part." (Getting soft, was he? But the kid was such a decent sort.)

III

THINGS went swimmingly for the rest of that week. Bill's script rounded out into a real thriller. Tommy Thompson jumped at the co-pilot's role. *Look at Life*, granddaddy of all the picture micromags, agreed, for an under-the-table consideration, to devote a full issue to the Centennial. Orville Wright, 5th, was quoted as saying that he had taken the job of Centennial Committee Chairman because he was certain that Trans-Planetary alone had the know-how to handle space travel.

Ben did fancy that the boys at the Public Relations Club gave him a few odd looks when he dropped in there for lunch, but he attributed that to jealousy. When, over the weekend, Fredda behaved like a carefree girl, instead of a sexdriven hellcat, his cup of content ran over...

...and shattered to bits when he called STDC on Tuesday and asked his old friend, Bob Isaacs, about getting the *Moonraker* trip on the big network.

"Sustaining, Ben?" came the first question.

"Of course sustaining, Bob, old son. This is an exact reproduction of the original voyage. It's the scoop of the year...of the century... for STDC."

"Well, maybe. But it grinds the old axe for Trans-Plan, too, Ben. Sustaining, I can give you maybe 15 minutes a day around midnight, Ben. And then I'll only be doing it because you're a friend. That's the American network, of course; not the worldwide or the planetary."

"But glory, Bob, old fella!" Hogan gripped the blotter pad on his desk and tore

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it savagely to pieces. "What's going on? This is big, I tell you. Big!"

"You got competition didn't you know?" The thin face on the screen struggled to keep itself straight. "Pan-World is sponsoring—that's spelled s-p-o-n-s-o-r-i-n-g—its own reenactment of the *Moonraker* trip."

"But they can't do that, Bob." Hogan felt as though his belt buckle were rubbing against his spine. "Trans-Plan owns the *Moonraker*."

"Pan-World's building a replica, Benjie; a little bird just told me. They say the original is a death trap. And you know what they're calling their show, Ben? 'The Betrayal of Col Kane.' The yarn's being written by Magnivac. Everyone says its a knockout."

"Especially if Gilbert Harrison is the star."

"Of course, Ben..." Amazement spread across that smug little face. "But how'd you know about that?"

"A little vulture told me!" Hogan snapped the connection.

"WE COULD get out an junction, Fredda." Ben sneered back at the red warning on his case, emptied its cigarets into his pocket, and hurled it at a wastebasket.

"Naughty!" said his boss. "Go pick that up and behave yourself. I don't fancy a boy friend with throat cancer."

"But Pan-World has no legal right..." he raged as he obeyed.

"Pan-World's a billion dollar corporation, sonny, even if it is licensed as a public utility. Your injunction would just make us look sillier. Trans-Plan's not big enough, yet, to buck the air transport trust head on."

"Who's behind them? Maybe we could put the pressure on, somehow."

"Oh, Herbert Morris is president, but that doesn't mean anything. I've sat beside him at dozens of trade association luncheons. Just a big windbag. But I've never been able to put my finger on the real power behind the throne. A smart cookie, whoever she is."

"She?"

"Let it pass. My female chauvinism was speaking. Pan-World may be owned by three Venusian scamours, for all I or anyone else knows."

"What do we do, then?"

"There's only one way to answer a debunker, Ben. You've got to give the public more excitement than he has to offer. Pan-World wants in on the space travel gravy, but what has it to offer in exchange? Safer ships? We haven't had a crackup since I was a child. Faster trips? They had to spend a mint of money on two experimental space ships to learn what I told President Morris at the very beginning: After a hydrazine jet is in

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orbit, it hasn't any fuel to waste; so it coasts until it makes planetfall. And even God can't make it go any faster."

"Lower fares?" Ben suggested.

"Pfui! When most people live on charge accounts, what do they care about saving money?"

"Greater luxury?"

"Our ships will provide that as soon as...as soon as ...Ben, I've got it!" Grey eyes blazing, she got out the shot glasses and filled them to overflowing. "We'll do a Judo fall...toss Pan-World right over our heads into the sun. You see before you a woman filled to the gussets with remorse and repentence."

"Talk sense!"

"GET ME A tri-di network spot next week. I'll go on and admit, with tears in my eyes, that my granddaddy was a crook and a skinflint. He knew *Moonraker* was a death trap; he did send Kane and his crew to their doom.

"'But I,' I shall say with a sob, 'I have suffered this shame in silence while I spent every cent of Trans-Planetary's profits...'no, no, no...not profits...'Trans-Planetary's *earnings* on research, seeking some way to make space travel not only safe as churches but far more luxurious than a trip on one of Pan-World's spacious globe-circling cruise ships.

"'And now I have found the way at last—a force field that takes all the sting out of cosmic rays, and a crew brave enough to defy spacer superstition and test it in full sight of all the people on Earth, Mars, Venus, Callisto, Ganymede, and even far-off Pluto.

"'True, they may be going to their deaths in the grand old' (sob) '*Moonraker* if that force field should fail, but ...but...'(Wait a minute, Ben. I've almost got it!)..., 'but to prove my faith in the generator, as well as to pay Col. Kane a belated tribute, *I* will take his place when the ship rides again on the 100th anniversary of his epic flight!'

"There!" She hurled her glass across the room and watched it explode against the wall. "Let's see STDC snoot our centennial now!"

"No," said Hogan.

"What do you mean, 'no'?" Her straight brows came together with a click.

"You're not going to make that statement until June 29, the anniversary of Kane's birth, and just a week before the *Moonraker* takes off. Oh, I'll put the fear of death into Isaacs to hold a spot open for us on that date. But Pan-World doesn't get an inkling of what goes on until it's too late to change their 'betrayal' pitch.

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"BEN, I TAKE back one or two of the awful things I've said about you. That makes sense."

"Also." He braced himself. "Also, you're not playing Kane's role."

"Why the hell not?"

"Against Gil Harrison in Pan-World's spectacular? Who do you think you are? Sarah Bernhardt?"

"Oh." Her full lower lip trembled. "Then I'll go as a passenger."

"Sorry again. If we get the *Moonraker* up at all with the generator aboard we'll be doing well. She can't carry another extra pound. On the other hand..." He paced the big room like a somewhat pudgy tiger. "We haven't hired anybody yet to play the photographer... But that's impossible too, Freeda. You're too big a wheel to go rolling 'round the Moon."

"If Pan-World blocks our franchise, I'll be nothing but a flat tire. What does this photographer-type do?"

"Search me. Go ask Carruthers. He's the only person with the slightest idea of what actually happened on that trip."

BILL TOOK the change in plans without a blink.

"May not be real, but it sure is romantic," he sighed ecstatically. "Pilot and co-pilot contend for girl photog's affections. When things get tough, they sacrifice everything to protect her." He made vague painting motions. "Can't you just see them? Better than hiring that comedian. We'll depend on Carruthers for comic relief." He let out a Rebel Yell. "Out of the way, Multivac! Here I come!"

"We're throwing a pretty big load on Carruthers," Ben objected. "After all, he's in his dotage. Maybe I'd better get out to the park and see how he's doing."

"Yeah," said Bill, as he ambled off in the direction of his dictating machine. "And take Piercey with you. I keep looking at her limpid limbs when I should be dramaturging."

"CHAP FROM Pan-World sounded me out today on exchanging a little information for a mink coat," Friday said as they hummed across town.

"And what did you say?"

"I said, thanks no, that I thought a new mink *and* a new Caddy would look conspicuous, but that he could speak to Mollie if he liked."

"That makes you a single-crosser."

"Well, look, Ben, a girl's got to think about her future. If Mollie keeps on working her fingers to the bone three days a week, six hours a day, for a few years longer, she'll have nothing but a past."

"All right. All right. A

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mink for Mollie... How about Bill?"

"Don't worry. All Bill wants right now is to write a pageant that will make the Mechanical's Muse's look and sound silly. If he puts it across, though, nail him down quick with a really handsome raise."

They landed and crossed the park toward a *Moonraker* swathed in scaffolding and swarming with workmen. Carruthers was "supervising" the rehabilitation from a folding chair on the lawn. Fredda was sitting at the old man's feet between Tolliver and a blackhaired, square-chinned man who must be Tommy Thompson. Her arms were thrown familiarly across the youngsters' shoulders.

"Look to your laurels, boss," Friday said out of the corner of her mouth.

"The *Moonraker's* a cranky old girl, friends," Carruthers was cackling as they came within earshot. "Not like these modern ships where you push a few buttons and then watch girliegrams till planetfall. The Colonel and his co-pilot really had to rastle her when she left or entered atmosphere on trial runs. Kick like a broncho, she could. Down in the engine room, Adams or I would hang on like blue death to keep from being knocked silly against something.

"And the thrust on #3 jet was a bit weak, spite of everything we could do. That made the ship pull to the left a trifle and..."

"TO THE RIGHT, Mr. Carruthers," Tolliver said quickly. "I mean, you told me last week that she yawed that way."

"Heh, heh, heh. You're right. It was to the right.... Oh, hello folks. Didn't see you come up.... As I was saying, she'd drag to the right and all hands would about bust themselves keeping her on track. We've all got our work cut out for us, 'specially since Frank, here, is a greenhorn. But he's learning fast, ain't he, Tommy?"

"Tolliver's picking up a number of things fast," answered the pilot, with a quick look at Fredda. "One of these days maybe he'll get good enough to handle a set of dummy controls."

"Seems silly for me just to clutter up the control room." Fredda measured all of her young men with faint amusement. "Can't I help out?"

"You can be ballast," Tolliver grinned. "You'll help trim ship by sitting where we tell you, and moving when we yell at you."

"Heh, heh, heh." Carruthers slapped his thigh with a hairy hand. "I'd forgotten that, almost. Hymie Schwartz used to come back from a test run with his camera banged up and the seat worn out of his pants from sliding around on

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the floor. And would he boil!"

"Oh my," Fredda gurgled. "What the tri-di audience has to look forward to."

"You could have your pants tinplated if you really wanted to avoid a scandal," Friday suggested demurely.

"Ben," said Fredda, "I'm glad you didn't fire that creature. I plan to boil her in oil." A a whistle on the *Moonraker* scaffold signaled noon, she jumped up, tossed that synthetic red hair out of her eyes, and cried. "Come on, folks. Iron Pants Reynolds is buying lunch."

REPAIRS ON the *Moonraker* were completed early in June. A week later, mobile equipment trundled to the park from Reynolds Field and, after some difficulty with archaic couplings and pipe threads, managed to get the ship's hydrazine tanks filled. That night she came to rest safely in a cradle at the Field after a tottering run that cracked both tri-di networks, made the cover of Look at Life and rated front page stories in the nation's handful of newspapers.

The next day Pan-World and STDC cut loose with the first blast in their joint multi-million dollar publicity and advertising buildup for "The Betrayal of Col. Blake." The Winchells of New York and Hollywood made the most of Gil Harrison's epic role, and Magnivac's rumored sensational script. Leaks from "usually unassailable sources" hinted that Trans-Planetary's franchise renewal chances had become negligible as the result of a preview for members of the U.S. Council.

"LOOKS GOOD, doesn't it, Ben?" Fredda said nervously on the day of her broadcast.

"Yes and no.... How are your vocal chords?"

"They need oiling." She reached for the whisky.

"Nuh uh! You'll croak like a frog!"

"My protector and payer-of-pretty-compliments! Which reminds me. You haven't been out to the ranch for a month. How come?"

"Haven't been asked."

"I *have* been rather busy." She fluffed her black hair. "But you really don't have permanent competition. Frank's a nice child, but a child after all. As for Tommy, there's something not nice about *him*, even when he's on his very best bedroom behavior."

"Friday says Tommy intends to marry you the worst way."

"Smart, damn her. Ask her to keep an eye on the big lug for me.... Another thing: How's Bill's script coming? We'll have to start rehearsals pretty soon."

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"He's got it done and it's a lulu. He's holding off the finishing touches until he sees how Pan-World reacts to your broadcast.... And now, get on your pretty paws, Fredda. We're due at the studio in ten minutes."

IV

FREDDA'S PERFORMANCE was another of those masterpieces that amateurs manage once in a blue moon. She came before the stereocameras without makeup, thus managing to look pitifully haggard as well as breathtakingly beautiful under her blazing mane. She spoke without gestures, hardly above a whisper, as though bowed with a guilt too great to bear. Yet her words carried distinctly to every listener on four planets and their many moons.

"It is all too true that Cal. Kane was betrayed," she began as soon as he had been introduced. "During my entire life I have lived with this secret, and I am indeed thankful to Pan-World and to this network for revealing part of the truth.

"As you know, if you listen to Winchells, that secret has made me bitter; has made me ashamed to marry and have children like more fortunate women; has wrecked my life. Why? Because, knowing the shameful injustice done to Col. and, I yet felt that I must remain loyal to my grandfather's, and father's memories."

"What a lovely whopper," whispered Friday, who was monitoring the script with Ben in the STDC control room.

"Again I want to thank Pan-World, even though it seeks my company's space travel franchise. It will tell you, next Thursday over most of these stations, a very small part of the truth about the trick played on the noble pilot of the *Moonraker*.

"And yet..." Those sad grey eyes looked straight into the nearest camera, and thereby into the souls of several billion viewers. "And yet the real depths of infamy to which Reynolds sank will *not* be found in the machine-made production starring Gil Harrison. Those depths are known only to the Reynolds heirs of whom I am, fortunately, the last."

"What's all this?" Ben cried. "That last sentence isn't in the script."

"Shhh!" Friday gripped his arm. "Listen to the woman!"

"IN ADDITION to the thousand dollars paid Kane for circumastrogating the Moon," Fredda was proceeding, "I now confess that he was promised a half-interest in the newly-formed Trans-Planetary Corporation."

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"Is that true?" Friday stared at Ben in utter astonishment.

"Of course not! Now you listen to the woman."

"That promise was verbal, friends of the tri-di audience. So it was not honored when the colonel returned, temporarily blinded and insane, from that awful trip. Today, Kane's heirs are entitled, therefore, to half my fortune —approximately 50 million dollars."

Friday hugged her boss until he gasped.

"Alas," that tired, exquisite voice in the studio continued, "I have never been able to trace any of the colonel's heirs. The only two my lawyers could identify—a daughter named Sadie, and her husband, Captain Frank Sage of the Space Patrol—disappeared with Kane in 1998 when he hijacked the Venusian star ship to keep it from falling into my grandfather's rapacious claws."

"'Rapacious claws,'" Friday crooned. "We're in, Ben."

"But I have not touched a dollar of the money rightfully belonging to the colonel," Fredda went on. "I have invested it in what I believe to be the finest...no! ...the *only* fitting memorial to that pioneer of space flight. This memorial is a force field generator that will..."

"She's back on script!" Ben mopped his forehead, then blessed the dosimeter because it was in the black for once. "Now why did she do that?"

"Probably had a hunch that Pan-World was going to bill the flight of our *Moonraker* as still another chapter in Kane's betrayal. By cutting a dead man in on the swag, she takes the heat off."

"And starts the greatest treaure hunt in history," the PR man groaned. "Tomorrow the office will be besieged by phony Kane heirs."

As he spoke, Fredda finished her broadcast with a flourish of verbal trumpets, burst into tears, and fled from the studio.

"HOW'D I DO?" she sniffled, still in the grip of her own oratory, when they met her in the corridor.

"Shed those 50 million dollar tears in my fiveandten hankie," Friday grinned as she presented a bit of lace.

While Fredda was searching for a stinging retort, a STDC page ran up with news that Gil Harrison was on the 'phone. "Follow me and see how a really great actor eats crow," she purred.

"I underestimated you and your staff, Miss Reynolds." Gil studied Fredda's tear-streaked face with open admiration. "That is something the real Col. Kane wouldn't have done. So congratulate

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yourself on not having hired me.

"I called, not only to congratulate *you* on a superb performance, but to say that your *Moonraker* flight will have no competition. At my suggestion, Pan-World has cancelled its tri-di show. I advised that I would be too busy watching you to put on a performance." He bowed as the screen darkened.

"Love that man," Friday sighed.

"This merits a blowout," said Fredda. "Ben, call the *Moonraker* crew and Bill; ask them out to the ranch for the weekend. I'll order the jet around. You may come along, Friday, if you care to."

"Nice of you," said the girl, "but I must go home first and get my chastity belt."

"Don't bother," said Fredda. "I'll invite Gil Harrison."

"Ladies! Ladies!" Ben groaned. "Please don't scratch each other's eyes out until the centennial is over."

"Why does she have to be such an uncalled-for stinker, then?" Fredda snapped.

"Because I've been stunk at most of my life, I guess," Friday answered, "and also because our ids don't mesh. But I'll be good if you will." She held out a slim hand.

Fredda took it gingerly. "A truce, then," she said with a slow grin, "but one more crack out of you, my fine girl, and I'll keelhaul you from the *Moonraker*."

LATER, WHEN they were alone and sipping tall drinks on the porch of the Reynolds' Wyoming ranch-house, Fredda said to Ben: "Where'd you pick up the she-devil, anyway?"

"Friday?" He frowned. "Why, she just came, sort of. Started in files. Then Bill took a shine to her and found she could fly and boss the IBMs around."

"She give him a tumble."

"No."

"And you?"

"We get along. Since she stopped cracking her gum, that is."

"When did that happen?"

"The day after I promised her that Caddy."

"The usual employee doesn't bait her big boss just after she's been bribed."

"Um," he agreed. "Not unless she knows where she can get a space yacht."

"Pan-World?" Fredda signalled a servo for more drinks.

"I doubt it. She didn't fake her delight when you cut the sky out from over their spectacular." He sipped the sun down in glory behind the Grand Tetons. "The spacers are dead set against your making capital out of Kane's ghost. Friday might be their girl."

"You post a tight guard around the *Moonraker* this weekend?"

"Forty special cops... Hey, you're getting more com-

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pany." A little plane was screaming in for landing on the ranch air strip.

"That'll be Gil." Fredda jumped up, adjust her short cowgirl skirt over neat flanks, and fluffed her back hair. "I had to ask him, after what I said to Friday."

IT WAS AN edgy group that gathered before a fire in the raftered living room that evening, drank a bit too much, listened to a group of Fredda's cowboys sing, and drank a bit more.

Despite her previous statement, Friday left Harrison severely alone and devoted her attentions to young Tolliver, who promptly fell madly in love. The actor tried to monopolize Fredda, but Tommy refused to play a supporting role. Ben and Carruthers were forgotten men.

"Sparks gonna fly before this night's much older, heh, heh, heh," the engineer whispered to the PR man during one particularly touchy incident. "Keep a half brick handy."

At dinner the Great Man took their homage as his due, avoiding condescension to the neophyte who would play the role he might have had, but needling the pilot politely when occasion offered.

"I didn't feel the Kane part here." Gil tapped his heart. "Only here." He produced his wallet. "So I deserved to lose it, and so should anyone deserve to lose his role who's in this thing for personal gain." As Tommy growled, and even Fredda had the grace to blush, he continued: "My ego might expand again if I could give any of you the benefit of my vast theatrical experience."

"What about coaching a rehearsal then?" Ben asked. "I have Bill's script here."

Gil agreed with enthusiasm. So, after quiet Filipino servants had cleared the dining room, the others placed tables and chairs to indicate the bridge and engine room of the *Moonraker* and waited for instruction.

"THIS," HARRISON told them when he finished thumbing through the script, "is a small masterpiece that would have made the Magnivac opus look knockkneed. It is, however, written in one of the most difficult dramatic styles—, that of the medieval Italian comedia della arte. Bill obviously did this because he realized that all sorts of incidents he couldn't foresee would occur on the trip. All he asks, therefore, is that you follow his characterizations and story line while extemporizing the dialogue."

"Wait a minute, boy," Lew Carruthers piped up. "You mean I've got to keep makin' up prose as I go along?"

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"It won't be hard," Gil smiled at him; "you just paraphrased one of Moliere's best lines.

"I'm sure you can all carry on... Ready?" He clapped his hands. "Lights. Cameras. Sound... You're on the air!"

"Miss Reynolds," he said two hours later, "you have a nice flair for both comedy and tragedy. I particularly liked that living ballast nonsense. You really put your heart into it."

"For that you can call me Fredda." She rubbed her "heart" gingerly.

"Frank, you amaze me," the G. M. continued as he slipped his arm casually around Fredda's waist. "You're playing Kane as if you have known him for years."

"Thank you, sir." The boy was starry-eyed at such praise.

"Lew, I want you to be not quite so young.'

"Young?" spluttered the ancient.

"Yes. You're trying to play yourself at the age of 25, and you're not up to it. Be yourself, just as you were when you were telling us those stories at dinner, and you'll wow them."

HARRISON looked at the pilot with a worried frown. "Mr. Thompson, I hate to keep nagging you, but you simply must remember that you are *not* the star. Of course you do the actual piloting, but nobody cares a damn about that. Frank must get the spotlight at all times, or the whole show gets out of balance. You have one big self-sacrifice scene; make the most of that."

"I'm not much on self-sacrifice, I guess." Thompson answered coldly. "And since the lives of everyone aboard the *Moonraker* will depend on me, I fail to see why I should toady to either a has-been or a would-be matinee idol." His shock of inky hair almost shed sparks as he worked himelf up. "If you folks don't like the way I do things, go hire yourself another pilot!"

"Tommy! Stop talking like a fool!" Fredda snapped. "You're not that drunk."

"Drunken fool, is it?" He lunged to his feet. "Just because there's a new and well-pressed pair of pants around here, I'm not..."

"Easy, Tom!" Ben was wishing he had taken Lew's advice about the brick.

"As for you, wise guy," the pilot whirled on him, "by ringing me in on this publicity stunt you've made me a punk in every spacer's eyes."

"Didn't make you a punk," Lew cackled. "You've been one since you were born."

Amazingly, Thompson seemed to get a partial grip on himself.

"I'm not that bad," he protested. "Why I could have..."

"You could have signed

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that Pan-World contract and become a second rate Big Shot," Gil cut in silkily.

FOR ANSWER, Thompson swung at the actor's prominent chin.

Gil caught the blow on his palm, making it crack like a pistol shot. Then, as the pilot's momentum carried him forward, he grabbed the extended wrist in both hands, pivoted so that his shoulder was beneath the pilot's armpit, and heaved.

His attacker soared across the room, struck a wall, slid to the floor, and lay still.

"Well!" Gil took a silk handkerchief from his breast pocket and wiped his hands. "Haven't done that since I played Westerns; hope it was only his arm I broke."

"Love that man!" Fredda sighed before Friday could get her mouth open. She touched a button and, when a Filipino appeared, continued: "Take this out, Junaito; patch it up a little; ship it back to New York.

"That had to happen, sooner or later," she went on. "Some of us probably will owe our lives to the fact that it didn't happen after the *Moonraker* took off. But where do we find another pilot at this late date?"

"I'll take the *Moonraker* up," young Tolliver answered her. "In fact, I've been holding out on you folks. I am...Ouch!" (Under cover of the table where they had been sitting together, Friday's spike heel had done its usual deadly work.)

"Maybe you could take her up, Frank," the girl rushed in, her voice much too loud. "But you couldn't bring her down. It took Col Kane to do that, remember?"

"But I *am* Colonel Kane," the boy answered gently.

FRIDAY'S head jerked back at this paranoid announcement as if she had been slapped in the face. The others babbled.

"This will prove my identity," he continued as he produced a dogeared document. It was, in appearance at least, a jet pilot's license renewal, issued to *"Col. Thomas W. Kane, U.S.A.F.R.,"* by the Civil Aeronautics Authority, in 1969.

"Oh, glory!" Friday exploded as she took it gingerly. "Another of *those* things. They must have issued them as souvenirs after the *Moonraker* flight."

For the first time that Ben could remember, Fredda lost control of a situation.

"No pilot, and now no colonel," she moaned. "Pan-World will win hands down. Oh, Ben, I should have taken your advice and forgotten about this crazy centennial."

"But I am not in the least crazy," Tolliver said with the sweet reasonableness that the mad sometimes assume so

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well. "If you won't accept my license, I'll prove it by Carruthers. "Lew, would you believe I'm Tom Kane if I told you where we went to dinner the night before I took the *Moonraker* up?"

"N-no," said the old man. (For some reason he looked halfway between breaking into tears, and bursting into raucous laughter.) "No, I've forgotten where we did eat that night. It was a long time ago."

"I told you the *Moonraker* yawed to the right, didn't I?"

"Yeah." Carruthers chewed at the ends of his stringy moustache. "But you're young . . . young."

"And how about Josette, the kid we both used to date when we were on the Paris run together?"

"Josette!" Lew's eyes brightened. "Wasn't that little number the damnedest . . . ? But folks don't grow younger, Frank. I ought to know; I've wished I could often enough."

"But you *can*, Lew. Just travel faster than light, and time reverses its direction. Do too much of that and you'll be back in your cradle."

"NONSENSE," Harrison burst out with surprising heat. "It would take an infinite amount of power to accelerate a ship to the speed of light. If you could go that fast, time would stand still, I'll admit; but the ship also would expand to the size of the universe. In other words, it would explode, killing you and everything else."

"Funny to hear an actor talking physics," Friday said sharply.

"Just a hobby," Gil smiled at her. "Got interested in relativity back in the days when I played science fiction heroes for the kiddies. Learned just enough to know that the speed of light is a limiting factor and can't be exceeded without creating a paradox."

"But not enough to know that +t can be replaced by -t in all basic time equations," the self-styled colonel grinned at him like a cheshire cat.

"Yes, I know that too, Frank." Gil was studying the younger man intently. "But how would you go about translating –t equations into reality?"

"Easy as falling off a planetoid, old fellow." He waved his arm grandly. "Let me explain it in terms of oceanography: The speed of a wave across the sea depends on the strength of the wind. But each water molecule in any particular wave moves much faster than that. A wave often is called a roller, you know, because the water in it rolls over and

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over as it moves, exactly like the spokes and other parts of a wheel. Thus a drop of water on the rim of a roller move forward—or backward—about twice as fast as the wave itself moves. Follow me?"

"Why, yes, sort of," the actor replied. Both he and Fredda were leaning forward at unwilling attention to what they knew was nonsense.

"The rub is that, when your rim drop rolls on from the front trough of the wave—down to the wave's root, as they call it—and then on to the rear trough, it cancels out its upper semicircle of fast forward motion. Its average forward speed exactly equals that of its parent wave by the time it makes one complete revolution. Still with me?"

"Frank," said Friday. "You talk too much."

"DON'T TRY to shush me, honey. I know what I'm doing... So you see, folks, the only trick you need to know when you're piloting a fusion-powered photon beam ship with constant one-G acceleration—that is, the Big Shot ship that I hi-jacked from Old Man Reynolds *et al* back in '98—the only trick you need is to know how to transfer from the front troughs of the quanta of light waves you're riding to the rear troughs of the waves just ahead of it. That way, you can travel at almost double the speed of light without breaking a single law of relativity. Unlike Alice in Wonderland, who had to run forward madly to stay in one place, you run twice as fast in order to go backward." He giggled.

"I'll believe you're Col. Kane if you just one thing," said Harrison thoughtfully. "Introduce us to your daughter and her husband."

"Why sure." Tolliver laughed wildly. "You see, I couldn't bring them back with me. They'd have been so young they'd have needed a wet nurse. But just you l-let me take you to the Moon. ...I m-mean the m-moonlet, where I go my ole starship parked, an', an' I'll..." He was shaking with hysteria by this time. "I'll s-show you just how the wavehopping trick's done."

"Friday," said Gil as he slipped a comforting arm about the boy's shoulders. "Frank's had a crackup, due to the strain we've all been under. He likes you. Take him outside and see if you can calm him down; if you can't, I'll fly him to a hospital."

"Tough," he said to Fredda after the girl had led Tolliver away. "Two crackups in one night. You'll cancel the flight, of course."

"And hand over my franchise to Pan-World on a silver platter," she snarled, her

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face grey and ugly. "I'll die first. I'll pilot the *Moonraker* myself."

"The hell you will," Ben cried.

"You can't stop me. It's my ship, and it's not licensed as a common carrier." Seeing his real concern she relented a trifle. "Don't forget, Ben, that I'm in the space travel business and that I've done quite a bit of planet hopping. I brought the ship in last time I visited Calisto Station."

"But that was different. The pilot stood right beside you, in case you made a slip. Besides, the *Moonraker's* a lot crankier than the ships you're used to."

"Lew," she said throatily, "will you go if I pilot?"

"Miss Reynolds, ma'am," said the engineer, "I'd go to Hades if you asked me."

"Gil," she whirled triumphantly on the actor, "will you play Kane after all?"

"Me?" He gulped and moved his fine hands as though balancing himself. "And...and have Pan-World sue me for every cent I own for breach of contract, bad faith, and God knows what else? No. Impossible. Anyway, I'm sure your better judgment will make you cancel the trip."

FRIDAY came back, looking pleased and puzzled at once.

"Frank's a lot better," she said. "Thompson needled him into taking one drink too many. Says he just wanted to see if he could put a scene over big. I'd say he did, wouldn't you all?" She smiled at them impishly. "He's taking a nap now."

"Where did he get that faster-than-light stuff?" Gil demanded. "It made pretty good sense, in a wild way."

"I couldn't get a word more out of him about that."

"Do any of you know anything about the boy, really?"

"Just what he told us," Ben answered.

"Hmmm." Gil chewed those thin, expressive lips. "He *has* to be off his rocker. He couldn't be that good an actor...good enough to fool me...without my having heard about him. Hmmm. And a for really having a starship parked... That's pure paranoia. Fredda, on second thought, I believe I ought to wake him up and take him to my doctor right away. He might become violent, or..."

A houseboy slipped in and whispered to Fredda. She ran out of the room.

"Now what?" Gil was annoyed at this sudden loss of audience.

"Bad news, I think," Ben said. "Don't get huffy."

THEY SAT in nervous silence until Fredda slammed back, her face a mask of fury.

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"That was Evans, from New York," she snapped. "Somebody just bombed the *Moonraker*."

"Horrible!" cried Gil, his white hands flying to his throat. "Is she a complete loss?"

"Bomb never touched her; the guards shot it to pieces in the air. Killed two bystanders, though. Pan-World must be getting desperate. Now I am going 'round the Moon, even if I have to make Ben play the colonel's role."

"I resign," yelled the PR man.

"I'll have you blacklisted. ...No more $25 dinners on your expense account."

"But I can't act."

"You act beautifully when you're in the proper, shall we say, setting."

"Wait a minute!" This from Gil, who had been staring at the wall as though it had opened to reveal a new heaven and a new earth. "On third thought, I've changed my mind about Frank. Maybe he will straighten out, long enough to put the show on at least, if I go along to steady him. Fredda, I'll play the photographer, for pure love of you. Pan-World can't squawk very loud if I donate my services in a supporting role."

"Pan-World! Man-World! Everywhere I turn," Fredda snarled. "Trying to break me! By God, I'll break *them* with my new force field. I'll make flights inside atmosphere as out-of-date a buggy ride. I will put 'a girdle 'round the Earth in forty minutes.' "

"Shakespeare," said Friday, applauding politely.

Fredda glared, then burst out laughing. "We're all ham acting tonight," she said. "Must be your influence, Gil. But come along with me and we'll forget all this nonsense until morning."

"Charmed, Miss Reynolds." He bowed and offered his arm.

V

TAKEOFF day dawned brilliantly, bringing a record crowd of gapers to Kane Park.

Things started clouding up when Bill reported, after a a check of bucket shops, that the smart money was still betting, 5 to 1, the *Moonraker* would either fail to take off, explode in space, or crash.

"Explode in space!" Friday cried. "Ben, you'd better check every inch of the ship."

"Evans is doing that now."

The visiphone chimed and Orville Wright 5th's frightened face appeared. "Pan-World has just asked United Stars to enjoin your flight," he panted, "on grounds that the ship is not spaceworthy, that a member of the crew is insane, and that its pilot has no license."

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"Stall!" Ben commanded.

"As long as I can, of course. Tell Miss Reynolds not to let anything delay takeoff or she'll never get a franchise renewal...and I'll be the laughing stock of New Washington."

"Check!" He sprinted for Fredda's office. He found her admiring her long-legged, pressure-suited figure in a mirror.

"How old do I look?" she beamed, as chipper as if she had had a night's sleep.

"Hah! Pull your foot out of that grave; we have to get to the ship fast. Where are the others?"

"They're there already, having breakfast... What's wrong?"

"Just a hunch...Friday," he whooped, "get the egg-beater while I kidnap a doctor."

When they wedged themselves into the *Moonraker's* control room, Harrison, Tolliver, and Carruthers were rolling on the floor in agony, admist a clutter of broken dishes and spilled coffee.

"Pump 'em out quick," Ben snapped at the goggleeyed physician. "Start with the old man."

"WHERE'D you buy that coffee, Lew?" he asked an hour later, when things had returned to a shaky sort of normalcy.

"Didn't buy it. Made it from the kitchen stores, like I always have."

"Friday, check the stores; replace anything that isn't sealed, and work fast. Bob Isaacs and the STDC boys will be here any minute to set up their equipment."

"Ben," said Fredda, who had been watching all this with huge delight, "will you marry me?"

"Later! Later!" he growled, too busy really to hear her. "How you feel, now, Lew?"

"Empty... But I can still handle the jets."

"Frank?"

"I've felt worse." Psychologically, the boy seemed perfectly normal today.

"Gil?" As the actor made a face and nodded, Ben added: "You're a volunteer, remember. Looks like a rough trip; you don't have to stick."

"I'll stick."

"Your funeral, and thanks from all of us... Countdown will start at 12:10:53, no matter what else happens. You'll be in constant touch with Evans or me by tight beam, except when you're behind the Moon. I see those technicians heading across the park, so you'll be on the system-wide network every hour, on the hour, until you occult, and will pick up the same schedule on the way home. O.K., Captain?"

"O.K." Fredda's attempt at a spacer's hardboiled grin

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turned out tremulous. "Don't worry; we'll put on a real show every hour, on the nose." She gripped his hand, then pulled him forward and kissed him, on the nose. "Good old workhouse," she whispered.

THE *MOONRAKER* wobbled upward like a dowager climbing a ladder while billions of tri-di watchers cheered, and three belated injunction servers shook their fists. Ben and his girl Friday watched from the Kane Field control tower until she dwinkled to a point and vanished.

"Wow!" The girl rubbed her cramped neck. "I must have pushed the old lady into the air myself." With strong, sure fingers she performed the same service for her boss.

"Thanks!" He relaxed, muscle, by muscle, sighed, and checked a cigarette case forgotten for hours. "That feels good."

The visiphone chimed.

"Thank God," cried Wright. "Been trying to locate you all over, Ben. You know those two experimental ships Pan-World has? I just got word they're missing from their base in Denver."

"Thanks, Orv. Stand by. I may want you to give a statement to the press.... Evans!"

The square man whirled from tracking the *Moonraker*.

"Do we have a ship we could arm...a big box of nuts and bolts might do for armament in a pinch...and get behind the Moon before Fredda does?"

"It wouldn't do any good unless we knew the exact orbits those ships of Pan-World's are following *and* the time they intend to intercept the *Moonraker*."

"That's right. I keep forgetting that, once you get a ship in orbit, it stays there, come hell or high water. Stupid! Stupid! The one thing I didn't anticipate. Kick me, Friday. Hard!"

"The *one* thing?" she asked as she obeyed. "A pity poor Frank *doesn't* have that starship up his sleeve. The way he explained it, a fusion-photon job maneuvers as easily as a ship at sea."

"MAYBE WE still can build a backfire... Orv!" He turned back to that perennially worried face. "As chairman of the centennial committee, call a press conference at once. Tell the boys that, if the *Moonraker* piles up *for any reason*, Trans-Plan will demand a full scale Council investigation, with Pan-World's air transport franchise to be cancelled, and double damages to be paid, if its guilt is established. Got it?"

"Yes, but..." Wright wrung mental hands. "If Fredda's rubbed out, Trans-

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Plan won't have a chance. What a pity she doesn't have a son."

"I suppose I ought to warn the ship," Ben hesitated as the 'phone clicked off.

"How can you do that without tipping off the Pan-World raiders?

"I'll wait until just before occultation, and hope the other ships already are out of range."

They lived in the control tower for the next 36 hours. Alternately they watched the *Moonraker* crew put on their ad-libbed, tightly-knit hourly shows, and listened to news broadcasts indicating that Wright was managing to stir up hornet's nests in New Washington.

Even Bill had to admit, when he came out from the office with the mail, that the cast was doing a superb job. Tolliver and Harrison were building up a nightmare atmosphere of suspense in which the satellite loomed as the villain. Fredda and Lew, amateurs or not, were playing up to them splendidly.

"I'm recording every word of it," Bill gloated. "When I get it polished it will run a year on Broadway. Then will Magnivac's tubes be red!"

WRIGHT'S table-thumping was making it almost certain that Bill's prediction would come true by focusing system-wide attention not only on the reenactment but upon the old time shooting-iron feud between the rival transport trusts. After Pan-World made the tactical error of insisting that its experimental ships were on shakedown cruises, millions of miles from the *Moonraker*, and then refused to reveal their tracking coordinates, Trans-Plan's centennial began receiving as much press coverage as the Tri-World Series.

All of this, under ordinary circumstances, would have made Ben Hogan inordinately happy; now it made him long to go out and get blind drunk from sheer frustration. Instead of doing so, he submitted while Friday massaged his cramped neck and fed him gp-to-hell pills to keep him functioning.

The white haired correspondent of New York's one remaining paper broke down and swore when Ben refused to let him interview Fredda by tight beam.

"*The Times* is a newspaper of record," he pleaded. "This interview will be read by posterity, drat it!"

"Drat posterity," Ben answered, staring at him, red-eyed and awful. "Miss Reynolds is much too busy making history to be interviewed."

"WE'LL BE goin' 'round the mountain in about five minutes," Fredda said, switching to the tight beam after the *Moonraker's* last

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broadcast before occultation. "The view is superb, particularly through radiation-proof lead glass. Wish you were here, Ben."

"And I wish you were here," he answered. "Orv says you should have had a son."

"That bad, is it?" He could imagine her tossing her hair back proudly. "I thought you were holding out on me, but I figured you had a good reason. We're being waylaid?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll do what I can, which won't be much, I'm afraid. Under my will, the company is yours if I don't come back; don't let Pan-World take it away from you if you can help it. And, if I do get back, maybe we can still do something about Orvie's suggestion. Bye bye, Benjie; and all my..." The beam nipped off as the *Moonraker* swung behind the satellite's crater-notched rim.

"Friday," he choked, "they can't show again for eight hours and nine minutes. "Let's go get six syntinis and two of Fredda's $25 dinners. She'd like that."

He was asleep, face down across a desk, when his secretary returned with her coat on.

THE EIGHT hours stretched into nine with no sign of the ship on the screen, and nothing but the endless grumble of Moon static on the tight beam.

"*Spurlos versenkt!*" Ben said bitterly at last. "Now it's up to United Stars."

He moved to switch off the beams.

"Wait!" Friday gasped.

The grey screen brightened while an STDC engineer frantically twiddled dials. Clearing at last, it showed, in tri-dimensional, full-color detail, a *Moonraker* control room that had been reduced to shambles.

Tolliver and Harrison—both either unconscious or dead—were jackknifed in opposite corners of the blood-spattered place. Fredda, on camera, displayed a beautiful shiner and a seraphic smile.

Carruthers lounged in the doorway, thoughtfully hefting a spanner.

"Love that man. Love that man," Fredda was giggling.

Ben shoved the STDC engineer out of his chair before the broadcast controls and cut in on the beam. "Fredda," he yelled. "Snap out of it. You're on the network."

"Ladies and gentlemen of the tri-di audience," he rushed on, "I'm Ben Hogan, Public Relations Director for Trans-Planetary. There seems to have been an accident. The *Moonraker* crew is in shock or something. I'll try to get a coherent story from Miss Reynolds.... I mean Col. Kane. Now, Fred-

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da, tell your viewers exactly what happened."

"He..." She pointed vaguely toward Harrison. "*He* tried to take us over single-handed. He *was* taking Frank and me apart when *he*..." she waved gaily at Carruthers, "came up the crawl hole with that lovely wrench."

"Not so fast, Fredda. Did Gilbert Harrison...he is playing the part of the *Moonraker's* photographer, ladies and gentlemen... Did Harrison crack up?"

"OH, DEAR, NO." She fluffed her back hair. hair. "The shindig started after the *Moonraker* changed course to avoid those Pan-World ships. Gil knew at once what was happening. He knocked Frank cold with one wallop and gave me this..." She touched her eye and winced, "when I mixed in. He was taking over the controls when his head happened to hit that wrench."

"What in the name of sin was he up to, Fredda?"

"In the name of Pan-World, you mean. I just went through his pockets." She waved a handful of papers. "Here's proof that he's their majority stockholder. He tried to put us on the spot with that 'Betrayal' spectacular. He ordered the *Moonraker* bombed, and came out to the ranch to put us out of commission there if the bombing failed. He teased Tommy Thompson into blowing his stack, but then Frank threw him off-center with that faster-than-light yarn..."

"Ladies and gentlemen," Hogan broke in on the endless flow of words, "I'll try to explain all this to you as soon as I get a connected story of what happened... Go on, Fredda. Are you trying to say that Frank Tolliver really *is* Col. Kane?"

"Nuh uh. But Gil couldn't be sure, so he had to go with us, *if* we went. First, though, he tried his best to put the crew, including himself, out of the running with food poisoning until his injunction-servers could arrive. Seems a sort of shame, Ben, that all his fine plotting went to waste."

"What happened after you went behind the Moon?"

"PAN-WORLD'S ships showed up dead ahead. Gil was too much of an actor not to take center stage and start to brag at that point. But the *Moonraker* shifted into a course that would by-pass the hi-jackers, and..."

"Shifted course?" Ben was holding his aching head. "But the *Moonraker* can't change course, once its in orbit."

"*He* changed it, somehow." Fredda pointed at the old man fondling the wrench. "Did it from the engine room, too."

"Lew," said Ben, "Here's

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the big scene you've waited for all your life. Take over."

"Wa'll," The engineer laid down his spanner after a look at the comatose Harrison and came forward creakily, "I jest had a few changes, made, heh, heh, heh."

Embarrassed, he ran a finger around the inside of his collar.

"Go ahead, man. Tell the tri-di audience exactly what happened."

"Jest a m i n u t e." Lew yanked mightily at the offending collar.

And his face come off!

Or rather, the rubberoid mask he had been wearing split lik a toy balloon!

The face it revealed was that of...of...

"Dad!" Friday screamed past Ben's ear. "You double-crossing old son-of-a-gun!"

"THAT'S MY harum scarum daughter, Sadie," the well-remembered face on the screen declared. "She was getting too uppity, so I've been holding out on her a little. And that..." He nudged the unconscious "Tolliver" with his toe. That's what's left of my son-in-law, Cap'n Frank Sage of the Space Patrol. Sure thought I'd taught him to handle his dukes better'n that."

"You...*you're* the real Col. Kane?" Ben gabbled.

"Yep! (I've really got to stop talking this Carruthers jargon.) Yes, Ben. I'm real."

"But Frank said...I mean, if you've been traveling faster than light, you should be younger than you look."

"I reckon Frank gave you all a bum steer...a false picture...to throw Harrison off the track. Unfortunately we can't exceed light speed, and turn time backward...as yet."

"Then, confound it, you should be as old as the real Lew Carruthers."

"Nope...No. I said we can't yet exceed light speed, but, with the fusion-photon drive we *can* approach that speed so closely that time almost stands still. So I am at your service, Ben, and ladies and gentlemen of the Solar System: Col. Thomas Kane, two years older than when I left you...by request...in 1998."

He fell silent while the human race held its collective breath.

"Sadie, Frank, and I got back from Sirius about a year ago," the colonel went on. "Those Siriuns are queer folks. May give us lots of headaches someday. But they sure know their surgery, as you can see by the way they patched up my bad eyes and heart.

"Anyway, when we made our report, United Stars decided to keep it, and us, under cover for a while. They were worried about a sudden upsurge of the old cutthroat, devil-take-the-hindmost competition of Big Shot days and

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asked us to look into it. While Sadie and I were checking on this Trans-Plan, Pan-World feud I visited the Moonraker to see my old friend Carruthers."

KANE STARED down at his strong hands for a time.

"Shouldn't have done that, folks. Lew recognized me before I could prepare him, and the shock was too much." His eyes were misty as he looked at them all now. "Poor old Lew. Never did get to go 'round the Moon.

"I was an actor once, remember, so I thought I might take his place. Figured this feud would come to a boil when Trans-Plan asked for a franchise renewal, and that the *Moonraker* might be a key to the whole thing. (Didn't tell anyone—even Sadie and Frank—what I was up to. Wanted to see how they'd make out on their own. They did pretty well, but I'm sure glad I came up the crawl hole when *I* did.)

"To kill time I installed a little fusion-photon reserve drive on the *Moonraker*, Drive's simple, you know, if you have had the know*how*. And after Gil Harrison signed on... (Time to hiss the villain now, folks, though I've known lots worse ones in the old days)... I also hooked up some auxiliary controls, just in case. After that I could steer the ship right from the engine room.

"Well, folks, that's about it. Now I'd better start patching our warriors.... Oh! One last thing: I want you all to know that I'm right proud of Miss birthday and anniversary, and tht I'm right proud of Miss Reynolds' birthday gift."

"Gift?" Fredda cried. "What gift?"

"Why you sort of made me a partner in your firm in front of all these people here." He patted her cold little hand, then turned back to the tri-di audience. "And folks, now that Miss Reynolds' new force field has made star ships safer'n helicopters, I'm going to propose—first directors' meeting we have—that we change the company name to Trans-Stellar Spaceways, Inc."

———— ★ ————

Coming Next Issue

PROBLEM IN ECOLOGY

A thought-provoking novelet

by Don Berry

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Editorial

YESTERDAY'S WORLD OF TOMORROW: 1927 III

THE YEAR, as we have seen in the first two sections of this essay, was an astonishingly fertile one in ideas. Consider, for example, the following paragraph from Benjamin Witwer's "Radio Mates" in the July issue. (All stories listed here are from 1927 issues of *Amazing Stories*, unless otherwise identified.)

Yes, after years of study and interrupted experimental research I was enabled finally to disintegrate, without the aid of heat, a solid object into its fundamental vibrations, t-r-a-n-s-m-i-t these vibrations into the ether in the form of s-o-c-a-l-l-e-d "radio waves" which I then attracted and condensed in my "receiving" apparatus, slowly damping their short kinked vibration-rate until finally there was deposited the homogeneous whole, identical in outline and displacement,—entirely unharmed from its etheric transmigration!

Once he had his "new" idea, however, it seems as if the author's imagination and invention lay down and expired; for the only thing he could think of to do with this for-its-time a-m-a-z-i-n-g discovery was to use it as a vehicle for the inventor's revenge. (It seems that the cad about to get what's coming to him stole our hero's girl.) New wine poured into the most decrepit wineskins; you find that again and again in this period.

Science fiction writers of the period were still hipped up

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over "vibrations", by means of which all manner of marvelous things were done. There seems to be an aura of rather musty spiritualism about it all; but one old-timer, George Allan England, used vibrations in an advanced-sounding manner when he had the luxury liner, the airplane *Nisir,* surrounded by them so that they acted like an early E. E. Smith force field. Bullets just bounced off. ("The Flying Legion", reprinted in *Air Wonder Stories,* January through March 1930.)

Matter transmission stories haven't been as frequent as some other types, but there have been quite a number of them. In most instances, there's no attempt to explain how; the author just tells us that this-here dingus dis-assembles whatever you want to transmit; that there device broadcasts the wave on a tight beam, and overyonder we have a receiving and reassembling set.

SO NOW THAT we know how matter transmitters work, we can get into "The Ultra Elixir of Youth", by A. Hyatt Verrill. (August issue). This is not lightly tossed off; the author goes into exhaustive detail, winding up with about how chemists separated over twenty hitherto unknown chemicals from the QW gas. "Among these is an entirely new element which he has named Juvenum, and which he believes holds the key to our success."

Now lest you get the impression that Mr. Verrill was merely evading the issue, let me hasten to explain that:

"...Several weeks ago the huge airship *Colossus* was destroyed by an explosion when passing over the village of Emerson. ...a most curious and interesting phenomenon ...has occurred where the accident took place. The health of the residents has greatly improved; several of the aged inmates of the County Home have recovered full use of their limbs and eyesight, and some ancient and dying trees have shown unusual and most astonishing growth. ... E. has personally interviewed and examined a number of persons, and she assures me that there are indisputable proofs of marked rejuvenation. We believe that the QW gas with which the airship was inflated was the direct cause of these interesting phenomena. As workers in the laboratory where this is manufactured have exhibited no signs of similar effects, we can only assume that the explosion, which has so far been inexplicable, altered the gas in such a way as to produce some chemical compound which has the power to arrest the ravages of age and to cause re-

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juvenation in organisms. Unfortunately the composition of QW is a closely guarded secret..."

SOME EXPLOSION! Some gas! Well, our chemists manage to get a bit of the gas, and set to work to get it to explode in a manner paralleling the mishap over the village, or in some other way make it Super-QW. They succeed and the mystery of how-come investigators only found piles of baby clothes lying around is solved. The reaction doesn't stop, you see; taking the gas rejuvenates you, and you keep on rejuvenating until you're once again a gleam in pappy's eye. Only much, much faster than you attained the age you were before taking.

Whether any kind of matter transmission may be possible some day (if it isn't already being done under wraps somewhere) is moot, but it seems safe to place reversed-entropy stories outside the pale of science fiction, particularly the ones where some character regains youth, childhood, and the womb in little more time than it takes to type the mss. account of it. Unfortunately, this was only the first of its kind; there have been later such stories, and dare we assume that the end has been reached?

THE COVER on the September issue shows an explorer being seized by a king-size, carnivorous plant. This illustrated "The Malignant Flower" by Anthos. (Another of the anonymous scientists, no doubt, who agreed to write some of this "scientifiction" providing that their identities were not revealed.)

Well, there are such things as carnivorous plants; and some of them do grow to a fair size, too. Having one large enough to subdue and envelope an adult human being, however, requires more explanation than the analogy with smaller, genuine meat-eating flowers which usually passes for justification. (Let's see, now—it's solid fact that growing plants can push up paving stones; so let's imagine this here super-redwood which sprouts up under the Empire State building, and...)

Meanwhile:

The gigantic spring of the air gun that hurled the passenger and mail projectiles from the Pacific to the Atlantic had not been compressed so tight since its construction seven years before.

So opens "The Tide Projectile Transportation Co.", by Will H. Gray, which appears in the same issue. These projectiles, it seems, are:

"...hurled up into the rarefied air by an air gun, the

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spring of which is compressed by the tide, or other means, to the required tension; then a couple of air blades from the rear end will take it almost anywhere. They are only partly automatic, so far, and each one must have a pilot, to steer it and stop it, and communicate with the outside world in case of trouble."

AND WHEN the pilot of one of these craft was ready to start:

She pushed the button... and immediately the starter, below in his office, pulled the trigger. A slight jar was the only effect of that gigantic air blast, so well did the shock absorbers and antigravitators do their work. These shock absorbers, resilient qualities of rubber foam, a substance similar to, but many times lighter than, rubber sponge. The inner casing of the projectile rested on many layers of this aerate material; each succeeding layer taking up the pressure when the preceding ones had been pressed almost flat.... Besides these appliances, there were cushions several feet deep in which the occupants sank completely out of sight when the gun was fired..."

However, one of the projectiles gets out of control, and bids fair to make an awful mess when it lands. They consider shooting it out of the sky with torpedoes, but that would kill the passengers; however, all comes out neat and romantic in the end.

The interesting thing is that, despite the flat impossibilities, this make for fascinating science fiction. (Some of the "wonder", no doubt, is abetted by the author's reminder that various things in the tale are "wonderful".) Travel by spring guns, with a craft that (normally) can be guided and steered once it's a projectile is an idea that could be convincing in the right place at the right time. The author was aware, no doubt, that Earth is not the right place, so he introduced a shot of magic—anti-gravity—which makes the difference between unbelievability and downright nonsense. To ignore the impossibilities and indulge in what Dr. Sloane called "poetic license" is unjustifiable in any era of science fiction; but introducing magic to say *if* we could get around gravity—*if* we had proper shock absorbers, travel by spring-gun projectiles might be like this, is tolerable—or, at least, was tolerable for its time. Today, you'll have to account for where you got the power to run your antigravity device.

IN THE NOVEMBER issue, Francis Flagg's "Machine Man of Ardathia" offers various varieties of "rays" which

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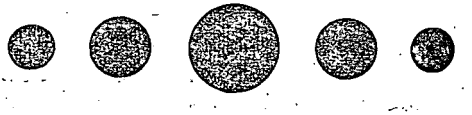
do strange and wonderful things. Since Dr. Macklin tells me he is tackling "rays" in his next article for *Science Fiction Quarterly,* I'll let the expert deal with that end. The interesting thing here is the portrayal of future—but *far* future—man: huge head which tapers into a body no more than half the size of the head. Stick-thin arms, stubby little legs on which he cannot stand. In fact, he goes around in his own private and personal transparent booth, equipped with ray-devices—each ray's a different color and does something different. We'll skip the question of where he gets the power, since it's so obviously a tender subject, and I expect Macklin to mention that, anyway.

Future-man as a dwarf with a big head; or a helpless, frail big-head which couldn't survive ten minutes without innumerable super-scientific gadgets; or just a big brain in a globe was very popular with science fiction writers for a number of years. Dr. Keller had big-headed dwarves in "The Conquerors". *(Science Wonder Stories,* December 1929—January 1930, and managed to make their behavior and society convincing; I do not recall any story dealing with the other two types about which as much can be said.

The final story on my list, Miles J. Breuer's "Riot At Sanderac" also seems to belong in Macklin's department; it was, however, the first story dealing with mechanical, artificial control of emotions—a device (not vibrations) whereby the operator could arouse, step up, or dampen whatever feelings in people he wished to. All very familiar now, of course.

But this was all new and different, back in 1927—a year when new, astonishing things were happening in the world, and one for science fictionists to remember, but not for the stories themselves. The proportion of readable (let alone good) tales was no higher in 1927 than it was in 1957—but it may take some looking to find a year that can compare with it for the number of fresh ideas and story devices which others would do notable work with later. RAWL



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A BIRD IN THE HAND

by David Gordon

illustrated by EMSH

Ronan Hull wore the tracer bracelets of a man suspected by the police; and any attempt to remove them, or go beyond the bounds of tracing, would be taken as proof of guilt. Only, since he had not been formally accused, Hull was not permitted to know the nature of the crime in question ...

THE POLICE walked in on Ronan Hull just as he had shoved the last of his clothing into the packer.

He had drawn a thousand kilos from his bank and stashed the notes in his belt pocket, along with his identity packet and his passage ticket on the *Sky Princess*. Then he returned to his apartment and, having selected the clothes he needed for the trip, began shoving them into the automatic packer while he softly whistled a ditty euphemistically entitled: "What A Difference A Dame Makes". He was halfway through the third verse when the announcer plate over the door glowed brightly and tinkled gently. A voice said: *"System Police. You will be allowed five seconds."*

The five seconds were permitted under the Privacy Act in order to permit a woman, if she were disrobed, to get something around her before the police barged in; and under the Equality Act, the police were forced to allow men the same privilege.

Ronan Hull, however, was neither a woman nor naked, so he merely said: "Come in."

There was no need for him to unlock his door; no legally locked door remains locked against an official police opener. The door slid aside, and three men walked in.

Law enforcement officials, like the poor, we shall have ...

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Complete
Novelet

Carduelis Carduelis helped Ronan Hull in...

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with us always. And, like the poor, they change but little from age to age. The men who stepped through the door of Ronan Hull's apartment may have had Doctor of Criminology degrees, but they walked with the same cool arrogance as had the soldiers of Rameses II, thirty-six centuries before, although they were somewhat more polite than their Egyptian predecessors.

THE FOREMOST of the three, a middle-aged man with a quiet voice and an almost pleasant face, said: "Ronan Hull? May I see your identification?" The speaker had his own identification in his hand: a small, metallic plaque.

Hull reached into his belt pocket. None of the officers moved. Their expressions flickered warily; but they knew as well as the accused that any weapon capable of burning through the faintly golden force-fields that surrounded them was not a device which could be hidden in a belt pocket.

Hull handed over his identity packet and took the plaque from the policeman's hand.

In brazen capitals, the plaque said:

DETECTIVE INSPECTOR JAMES HANLON QUESTER
Ph.D., M.F.D., C.D.
SOLAR SYSTEM POLICE, EARTH DIVISION
CENTRAL EASTERN SEABOARD AREA HEADQUARTERS, GREATER NEW YORK

Quester, thought Hull. *That's a hell of a fine name for a cop. A hell of a fine name.*

And, evidently, a pretty good cop held that name. A man with doctorates in philosophy, forensic medicine, and criminology was no slouch when it came to brains; and, so far as Hull could judge by appearances, Inspector Quester seemed to have more than just scholastic ability.

THE INSPECTOR finished inspecting Hull's identity packet. He flipped it shut and tossed it to the suspect. "Very well, Mr. Hull—if you'll accompany us to the station, we'll proceed with the formalities."

Ronan Hull slid the packet back into his belt. "What's the charge, Inspector? Gross misuse of the English language or criminal negligence in failing to watch the TV commercials?"

When a policeman hears a joke from a suspect, he never smiles—never. Only if the suspect is the butt of a joke by another copper is a policeman permitted to betray any sense of humor; were he to do otherwise, he might be directed to hand over his badge. The three stony faces

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that looked at Hull indicated that the cops who wore them were well trained in the traditions of their profession.

The inspector half closed his eyes and said, in a monotonic voice: "I am required by law to tell you that you are under arrest on suspicion of a felony. Specific charges may be made if further investigation by the authorities discloses enough evidence to warrant bringing you to trial."

"Okay," said Ronan Hull. "Let's go down and put on the bracelets."

"That's very co-operative of you," said Inspector Quester boredly. He stood aside and waved toward the door. "After you, Mr. Hull."

THEY TOOK him to the roof and bundled him into an aircar, which promptly lifted into the air and headed downtown. All the way down to New Centre Street, the police maintained a seemingly unconcerned silence while Hull frowned in thought.

A felony, eh? That, to put it mildly, covered a multitude of crimes. Ronan Hull dug into his memory and came up with a goodly number of sins and a handful of misdemeanors; but, so far as he could tell, there wasn't a felony in the bunch. What was it they had him tagged for, then?

The arrest itself didn't mean much. It wasn't the first time Hull had been nabbed, and it wouldn't—he hoped—be the last. But up until now, he'd always had an idea of what he'd been suspected of.

At New Centre Street, the officers took him to the identification room and checked his retinal and brainwave patterns against those previously recorded. When they were satisfied that Ronan Hull was really Ronan Hull, they took him into the Bracelet Room.

"Put your left arm into the machine," said Inspector Quester quietly.

Hull sat down obligingly and thrust his left arm into an opening in the big handcuffing machine that loomed against one wall. Something snickered inside the mechanism, and his arm was gently gripped in an unbreakable hold. Then the machine began to mutter softly inside.

"You have any idea what this is about?" asked the Inspector conversationally while the machine worked.

HULL SAID: "Inspector, I am positively aglow with the purity of innocence."

The inspector pursed his lips speculatively and looked far into the infinite distance. "That doesn't exactly answer my question."

Ronan Hull's blocky face suddenly beamed with beatific innocence. "No, it doesn't, does it?"

The inspector glanced sleepily at a meter on the

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face of the machine, a meter that Hull couldn't see. "You're hiding *something*," Quester said, in a voice that indicated that he was utterly bored and totally uninterested in the whole silly proceeding.

"Sure I am," Hull answered. He knew that the handcuffer had an auxiliary lie detector circuit in it; but he also knew that all the detector could do was register a slight nervousness and apprehension on the part of the prisoner.

"Yep," said Quester, still looking at the meter as though he hadn't heard Hull's admission, "you're hiding something."

"Tell me, Inspector," Ronan Hull asked pleasantly, "did you ever have a prisoner who *didn't* register on that meter?"

The cop gazed at him mildly. "A few times," he admitted; "but they were all mental cases."

"It figures."

The 'cuffer clicked suddenly and released his arm. When Hull withdrew it from the opening, there was a seamless metal band around his left wrist.

"Now the other arm," said the inspector.

HULL INSERTED his right arm, and it was grasped as the left had been.

"Ever done anything illegal, Hull?"

"Who hasn't?" Hull countered.

The inspector shrugged and looked at the meter.

Ronan Hull wasn't worried about the questioning; it was just routine stuff. Uncovering guilt by means of a lie detector requires detailed and expert questioning, the kind of questioning that would give Hull more information than the police wanted him to have right now. Such questions as: "Where were you on the night of Friday the Thirteenth?" and "Do you own a five kilowatt Nordsen beamgun?" would give the prisoner clues to the crime he was suspected of, and the Public Prosecutor didn't want that information to leak out until the proper time.

The machine finally released Hull's right arm; and when he pulled it out, there was a band on his right wrist similar to the one on his left. Quester looked them over, then pushed a button on a nearby intercom.

"Check finder on Hull, Ronan; Cuff set seven nine dash three oh five dash oh oh seven."

THERE WAS a momentary silence from the other end, then a voice said: "Got him. Have him walk across the room."

Quester merely glanced at Hull, and Ronan Hull obediently got up and walked across the room.

"Checkcheck," said the voice; "He's pinpointed. Recording."

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"Fine." Quester released his finger from the button. "You're free to go, Mr. Hull." Then his voice became monotonic again as he droned off another formula. "You are warned that any attempt to remove or disable the tracer handcuffs with which you have been provided is punishable by five years imprisonment, or the full penalty of the crime you are suspected of having committed—whichever is the greater. Three days notice must be given to this department of intent to leave Earth for any other planet in the System. Under no circumstances will you board, or attempt to board, any vessel equipped with a Phillips-Bauer Translator drive or any other device permitting translight velocities."

Hull shook his head. "Sorry, Inspector; no can do."

For the first time, the Inspector showed slight surprise. "No can do what?"

"Give three days' notice. I'm scheduled to leave for Mars on the *Sky Princess* this afternoon."

"You'll have to wait." The policeman's voice held a note of utter finality.

AGAIN, Hull shook his head. "Oh, no. Look it up, Quester; my reservations were made a week ago. According to the law, any arrangements made before..."

"I know, I know." There was a certain irritation in the officer's expression and voice. Then it faded, and he sighed in resignation. "Foiled again," he said tiredly. "I didn't want to go to Mars."

"I see I've grown a tail," said Ronan Hull.

"A long, bushy one," agreed Inspector Quester.

"Well, then I'll see you at the spaceport. Take care of yourself; bring your long woolies." Hull was already heading for the door as he spoke. At the door, he stopped and looked back at Quester, who was standing in thoughtful silence. "Don't bother to show me, Inspector," he said, "I know the way to the Public Defender's office. But thanks, anyway."

And he went on out.

CHAPTER II

THE MAIN lounge of the interplanetary liner *Sky Princess* was like a fairy palace in beauty, and like a Vanderdecken generator in efficiency—which was as it should be in a luxury ship. The walls were of pale blue plastoid, and were decorated with inlaid designs which shone with the faint silvery-violet of passivated, hardened, metallic potassium. It might very well have been a salon in a Terrestrial hotel; not even the faintest hum of the motors came through the insulated walls to betray the fact that the room was not sitting solidly on Earth but

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was in fact, accelerating through space.

Ronan Hull lounged back in a contour-caressing chair and allowed his eyes to examine one of the intricate silver-violet inlays while a cigaret burned unheeded in his hand.

To his left sat Inspector Quester in another chair, his eyes focused on a book with the imposing title of *"Neuromotor Reactions and Radiation in Forensic Medecine."* Hull was aware of the inspector's presence, but Quester had acquired a strictly secondary importance. The person who occupied first place was merely a blurred splotch of pastel pink and golden yellow in the corner of Hull's right eye. He rigorously kept his eyes off the girl while he thought.

Slowly, he was beginning to get a picture of what might be the reason for his arrest.

THE PUBLIC DEFENDER'S office couldn't tell him anything, of course, but they knew what he was charged with—or, rather, might eventually be charged with. They hadn't told him what the charge was, but they had asked him for a complete resume of his activities for the forty-eight hour period of the previous Tuesday and Wednesday. That had given him some inkling of what was going on.

Then, when he'd come aboard the *Sky Princess*, he'd seen Carduelis. He'd started to speak to her, but she'd given him the blue-eyed pleading look of the frightened female—the one that always works on suckers—and whispered: "Please! Not while the policeman is around! Pretend you don't know me."

So now Ronan Hull sat staring at the wall of the lounge trying to put two and two together and get an answer somewhere between three and five.

Because he had first met Carduelis at Tedric Smith's house, during the same forty-eight hour period that the Public Defender's office had asked him to explain. The party had begun on Tuesday evening.

TEDRIC SMITH was a man somewhat older than Ronan Hull. He had a mansion in Philadelphia, a few millions in the bank, a red-haired wife named Clara, and a wonderful sense of balance when it came to inviting guests to a party. Ronan Hull had no sooner walked in through the door than he had been introduced, in rapid succession, to a short, fat, pale man from the Aldebaranian System; a gigantic black from Sirius IV; a captain in the Interstellar Exploration Service; and the Shah of New Tehran, on Alpha Centauri A III.

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Tedric had then wandered off towards the game room, leaving Hull to his own devices. Hull immediately tapped the seven-foot Sirian on the shoulder.

"Pardon me, sir; Tedric has a habit of running over names so fast that I didn't get yours."

The Sirian smiled. "Aylinken, sir. And yours is Roland Hull?"

"Ronan Hull. You wouldn't, by any chance, be with Sirian Terraforming, would you?"

The black chuckled. "You've got me nailed. I'm with the gravitic engineering section. Why?"

Ronan Hull grinned wryly. "We're competitors, then; I'm with United European."

The Sirian snapped his fingers. "Ronan Hull! That's right; I place you now. You headed that project on Procyon V, two years ago."

Hull nodded. "And you're the Aylinken Joanz who set up Interstellar Exploration's satellite base near Gorvobast. Let's go grab a drink and talk shop—without discussing trade secrets."

"I'm with you," said Aylinken.

BY THE TIME an hour had passed, both men were on the high, happy road to pleasant semi-inebriation.

"I have been wondering," Aylinken was saying, "just why Tedric invited us here. He certainly doesn't want to see Mars terraformed."

Hull shrugged eloquently. "I've known Tedric Smith for years. He never lets business stand in the way of personal friendship; or vice-versa. Two separate things in his mind. If he pulls a fast one on you in business, he doesn't expect it to make you sore at him, personally; if you pull a fast one on him, he won't hold it against you. Follow?"

Tedric Smith certainly had every objection to having Mars terraformed. To transform Mars into a planet that would be capable of supporting human life without the domed cities would add immeasurably to the cost of his own business. Martian Mining and Manufacturing—which Tedric, in essence, owned—was the sole reason for humanity's existence on Mars. To terraform the planet would wreck Triple-M. If a paragravity generator were sunk into the planet's core, the increase in gravity would cause a corresponding increase in shipping costs, because of the additional energy needed to overcome the peegee potential. If Mars became farmable, and capable of supporting Terrestrial life, the vast, naked ore deposits would be covered by soil. Triple-M didn't want that—which meant that Tedric Smith didn't want it, either.

THERE WERE even more forces arrayed against Terraforming Mars. Aylinken asked Hull about them.

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"I don't get it," he said. "We've been terraforming planets for two hundred years now, but Mars has held out steadily. No one objects to any of the others; why object to Mars?"

"My dear Sirian colleague," Ronan Hull said gravely, "it is obvious that you know nothing of the sentimental Earthman. Mars was the first planet ever reached by men—not including dear old Earth, of course. Terraforming was unheard of back then, so the domed cities were erected. The whole economy of the Martians is built around Mars as she is, not Mars as she would be after terraforming.

"Add to that, the fact that the planet Mars is the only one we've ever found which contains relics of a pre-human intelligent race. The Martian paleontologists and archeologists insist that we have a great deal to learn from that long-dead race, and that terraforming would destroy the artifacts that are still undiscovered. Follow?"

AYLINKEN shook his head ponderously. "I wish you'd quit saying: 'Follow'. I'm glued to this bar, and I couldn't follow anyone anywhere. Who is that extraordinary creature?"

Ronan blinked, his mind attempting to follow Aylinken's.

The Sirian's eyes were looking over Hull's shoulder, so the Earthman turned around to look.

"That extraordinary creature" was an uncommonly beautiful girl, who was being escorted toward them on Tedric Smith's arm. She was easily six feet tall, only a hair shorter that Hull himself. She had a magnificent figure, and her head was crowned with a sheath of gleaming yellow feathers.

Aylinken was gazing with fascination at her upper torso.

"Can't be real," he said softly.

"They are," Hull told him.

"That's a fifty-four inch bust or I'm blind," Aylinken objected.

"Easily," Hull agreed. "You ought to see the men; built like barrels. It's the chest that does it, not the breasts. She's from Teravis. Most of the planet is too hot to live in very long; the only place that a human being can be comfortable is high in the mountains. The air's rare up there, so the settlers with the biggest lung capacity were the only ones who survived. That was four centuries ago, so the strain has become standard."

"Did it also cause them to sprout feathers on their heads?" the Sirian asked.

"NOPE. THE early settlers got some sort of virus infection there; nothing fatal, but it made the hair fall out. So the women

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started making caps out of bird feathers—they've got all kinds of bird life on Teravis—to cover up their bald heads. The virus is still endemic there; Teravins have to be inoculated before the Interstellar Health commission will let them leave Teravis. That's why you don't see many of 'em.

"Anyway, it has become the custom for the men to shave their heads, and the women wear those feather caps over their noggins. Pretty, huh?"

"Very," agreed the huge Sirian shortly.

Neither man said anything more; the girl and Tedric were within earshot.

"Well, well," Tedric said in his honestly hearty voice, "I've been noticing that you two supposed rivals have been yakking for an hour. I have no doubt that you're plotting to combine against me, so I brought somebody over to break up the party."

He waved his hand. "Miss Carduelis, may I present a couple of terraforming engineers? The big galoot is Aylinken Joanz, a Sirian; the wavy-haired lady-killer is Ronan Hull, of Earth. Gentlemen, Miss Carduelis Carduelis, of Teravis."

The girl smiled devastatingly and extended her hand. Hull and Aylinken both reached for it, and their hands collided without touching hers. They glared at each other goodnaturedly, tried to push each other out of the way, and finally ended up by shaking hands with each other and bowing to the girl. By this time, she was half helpless with laughter.

"Men never grow up," said Tedric sadly, "only old."

"Surely," said Carduelis, "men who can transform whole planets are not children? They look—ah—very much men to me."

"TERRAFORMING engineers are the worst of the lot," said Tedric. "They have a return-to-the-womb complex. Make everything just like Earth."

"Surely that is not so bad an idea?" the girl asked archly, leaving all three men to wonder just exactly what she meant.

"There *are* those who call them home-wreckers," said Tedric.

"Murderers is a better term!" snapped a high, sharp voice.

Four heads swivelled to see who had interrupted a heretofore private conversation. It was the short, fat, pale Aldebaranian.

"Ah," said Tedric smoothly, "you've all met Dr. Dryber, I think. Dr. Dryber is an archeologist and biologist."

"Murderers?" said the Teravin girl in a puzzled voice.

The little man's eyes glowed with anger. "That's what I said. So would you, if you'd seen what has happened to the native life of a

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planet after these butchers get through terraforming it."

"Oh, come, Doctor," said Aylinken in his comfortable baritone, "most of the planets we terraform are lifeless. The others have only a few species, and these are always carefully preserved."

Dr. Dryber's fat, moist lips spat out a virulent three-word phrase. Then he looked at the girl. "I am sorry, Miss Caduelis; please accept my humble apologies." Then he turned to Tedric. "May I have a few words with you, sir?"

"Certainly," said the unperturbed Tedric. "These people will excuse us, I'm sure." And he strolled off with the acerbic butterball.

"FUNNY LITTLE man," said Carduelis. "But why did he apologize to *me*? It was you two that he called..." she repeated the phrase, and she not only had the words; she had the music.

Aylinken gazed innocently at the ceiling. Ronan Hull cleared his throat and said: "Do you know what that means, Carduelis?"

She nodded, wide eyed, and then went on to explain, in painstaking detail, exactly what the phrase meant—and why it was biologically ridiculous, not to say impossible. Aylinken kept his eyes on the ceiling; Ronan Hull was absolutely certain that his heavily pigmented skin was concealing a furiously crimson blush. Hull, himself, was not in the least embarrassed, but he was doing his damnedest to keep from laughing.

"...so why would he apologize to me?" the girl ended up.

"I believe," Hull said judiciously, "that the Aldebaranian society holds that certain words and certain processes are not considered fit topics of conversation when both sexes are present."

"So does the Sirian society, to some extent," Aylinken mumbled without taking his eyes off the ceiling.

Carduelis gazed at the fat man, who was far across the room by now, talking animatedly with Tedric. "What a peculiar idea! Why did he call you such a thing, anyway?"

Ronan Hull shrugged. "I don't know. Maybe he thought we'd try it and kill ourselves in the process."

"I DOUBT if he'd have objected if we had killed ourselves," said Aylinken, lowering his eyes from the ceiling at last. "He knows that both our companies are trying to get the contract for terraforming Mars."

"Do you know him?" Carduelis asked.

The Sirian nodded. "He's got a screwy idea that the ancient Martians are still alive on Mars, hidden in some subterranean caves or something. If we terraformed it,

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of course, the high gravity potential would kill them."

"To say nothing of the high pressure," Carduelis said. "This soup you call an atmosphere is enough to strangle one."

"Is it that bad?" Hull asked.

The girl spread her hands. "If I stay too long here, I will probably develop pneumonia. It has happened to our people before."

Aylinken nodded. "That makes sense. Depends on what you're used to. Anyhow, this Dr. Dryber is a real nut on the subject. He..."

At that moment, there was a commotion across the room and all three of them turned to look. Dr. Dryber was shouting and waving his hands. "Tedric Smith, you're a fool!" he said in a clear voice. And with that, he turned and walked towards the door. At the door itself, he stopped and glanced across at Aylinken. There was venom in his glare. Then he opened the door and was gone.

TEDRIC just stood there for a moment, then he sauntered back to the bar where Ronan Hull and the others were standing.

"What's old Dry-bones blathering about?" Aylinken asked.

"He's furious," Tedric said, chuckling. "I didn't agree with him that you two were..." He glanced at Carduelis. "...were what he said you were."

Hull had a hunch that there was more to it than that, but he didn't press the point.

"Those bracelets you're wearing are very pretty," said Carduelis suddenly. "Where can I get a pair?"

Ronan glanced down; he hadn't noticed that Tedric was handcuffed.

"That's easy, Miss Carduelis. All you have to do is be somewhere in the vicinity when a major crime is committed."

"I don't understand."

Tedric Smith sighed and began the explanation.

III

THE METAL bracelets are part of an answer to an age-old question: Is it morally right to imprison an innocent man?

Obviously, it isn't. And, according to the ancient English law, from which modern law is derived, a man is innocent until he is proven guilty.

Centuries ago, a man was simply arrested and slapped into a cell to await trial at the convenience of the State. True, the Constitution of the Old United States guaranteed a "speedy and public trial", but there had never been any legal definition of the word "speedy". A person accused of a crime might remain in prison for a year or more while successive trials and ap-

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peals were ground through the mills of justice, which seem to go slower than those of God and do not do so fine a job.

The Edda m-Schwiller bracelet solved two problems at once. As long as they are worn, a man can be pin-pointed by the police anywhere on a planet. No matter where he goes, the finder attuned to those bracelets can give his position within a little less than ten feet at extreme range. Interplanetary distances blur the readings; so any suspect who wanted to go gallivanting around over the Solar System had to be accompanied by a police official. Under no circumstances would he be allowed to board an interstellar vessel. But as long as he stayed on Earth, he was free to come and go as he liked.

The bracelets, then, eliminated the problem of incarcerating an innocent man, and also eliminated the bail-bond problem, which seemed to be a device for freeing the wealthy and keeping the poor in prison.

THE SECOND problem that was eliminated by the Edda m-Schwiller bracelets was that of the disgrace once attached to arrest. The police could, and did, arrest everyone who was even remotely connected with a crime under investigation and slap a set of cuffs on them. Usually, the cuffs were off again in a few days, or a week, and the suspect might never know what he had been suspected of. Since nearly everyone has, at one time or another, been subjected to the mild annoyance of the handcuffs, arrest, in itself, is no social disgrace.

Thus far, the problem of removing them without legal sanction has not been solved. Tinkering with them in any way immediately sends an alarm to headquarters. Even cutting off both arms—which has been tried—doesn't solve anything because each cuff is tuned to the other through the individual's nervous system. If that connection is severed, the alarm is tripped. Once they are put on, they stay on until they're officially removed—or else. The law is tough on people who try to take them off, so only those who are guilty ever try the trick, and they are always caught.

That night at the party, Tedric Smith had been wearing a set; and now, Ronan Hull, in a space line somewhere between Earth and Mars, was wearing a similar set.

THE WHOLE thing was still foggy in his mind. What the devil was going on? A crime had been committed, that was certain; but what kind of crime?

Hull glanced briefly at Inspector Quester, who was calmly reading his book. For-

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ensic medicine. That suggested murder.

But who had been murdered? Someone at the party?

So it would seem. But there had been fifty or more people there during those two days; how could Hull know which one was dead and which one had done the killing? Always provided, of course, that the crime *was* murder.

It might not have anything to do with the party; but if it didn't, why was Carduelis Carduelis, the Teravin girl, so worried about the fact that Quester was aboard, and why didn't she want Ronan Hull to admit he knew her?

On the other hand, if she *was* mixed up in anything, why wasn't she wearing bracelets?

He needed more information.

HE LEANED over, tapped Inspector Quester on the knee, and said: "How long had he been dead when you found him?"

"Less than an hour," Quester said. "He..." Then he realized what he was saying and braked his vocal cords to a halt with squeaking suddenness. "What the hell do you know about it?" he bellowed.

Several heads turned to look at whoever was making such uncouth noises in a respectable spaceship lounge.

"Only what you've told me, Inspector," said Hull, grinning. "Now be quiet or the bouncer will throw you out, and it's a little thin out there."

Quester glowered for a moment, then relaxed with visible effort. "Hull, that was either very clever or very stupid; I'll leave it up to you to figure out which."

"Okay, thanks. Now I'll tell you, Quester; if I'm in a jam, I want to know what kind of jam. I figured it was homicide because *you're* on the case. Now, I *know* it was homicide. That is absolutely all I know so far, but I intend to find out a lot more."

Quester's turn had come to grin. "You're not going to find out much on Mars."

Hull nodded. "I thought it was awfully easy to talk you into letting me go. Now that we've played each other for suckers, we can both be smug."

"He who smugs last smugs best," said Quester calmly.

THE REMAINDER of the trip was uneventful. Ronan Hull neither tried to seek out the girl from Teravis nor tried to avoid her. Quester kept on reading his book, even at mealtimes; he absolutely refused to be drawn into any conversations unless they were totally innocuous.

When the ship set down at Thoth Basin, Quester took charge of Ronan Hull as though the engineer were a five-year-old who had to be led around by the arm. Quester bustled them both through

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the customs inspection office in record time, and when they stepped outside there was a car waiting for them. On the side of the car was the glowing insignia of the System Police.

It wasn't the first time that Ronan Hull had been on Mars, but the first few hours always seemed strange to him. Light gravity was only a minor part of it; the feeling of being closed in beneath the domes that covered the cities was the tickler. It wasn't that he suffered from claustrophobia; it was simply that when he looked up he expected to see sky, not a purplish haze. The darkness of the Martian sky, even at high noon, looked queer through the translucent plastic of the dome high overhead.

THE POLICE car took him straight to headquarters. He was taken into a room very similar to the one in New York, and his handcuffs were attuned to the finder mechanism in Thoth City.

When it was over, Quester patted him on the back. "There you are, Friend Suspect; all set for your Martian tour. Be sure to let the boys know three days before you want to come back."

"Thanks, Friend Cop. Aren't you going to stay around and keep an eye on me? I'll be lonesome without you."

Quester shook his head. "Those bracelets will watch you closer than I could. I'm heading back to dear old Earth, thank you. I'll be waiting for you at the other end, though."

"Unless I'm cleared before I go back."

"Of course," agreed Quester. "Of course." But there was an odd note in his voice.

THOTH CITY is the oldest extraterrestrial city in the Galaxy, at least insofar as we human beings know. For four centuries it had stood, changing little, dust-free and weatherless beneath its protective dome. The air was thin, exerting a pressure of only ten pounds per square inch; but it was thirty percent oxygen, which made it easily breathable.

Hull took an airtaxi from police headquarters to the nearest hotel, the Claymore, registered, and went up to his room. The first thing he did was to flick on the communicator.

"I want an infraphone circuit to Earth. The office of the Public Defender, New York Area. Tell them Ronan Hull is calling."

"Yes, sir. I will call you."

Hull flicked off and lit himself a cigaret. Someone had been murdered; that much was clear. But who? And why did the police suspect him?

There was, of course, the possibility that he *had* done it. But with modern mind-training techniques, it was al-

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most impossible for a man to be hypnotized, even with a drug, so perfectly that no trace of it existed in the memory. And if it *had* happened that way, Hull was in the clear; the psychologists could dig it out easily enough, and prove that Hull had not been acting under his own volition.

Still, he didn't quite believe that theory. His own memory was too well integrated. There were no flaws in it that he could detect, and they had the vividness of reality, not the mere verbal conviction that implanted memories have. No, he would have to work on the assumption that someone else had done the dirty work.

The question was: Who had done what, and with which, and to whom?

SINCE HE had not yet been officially accused of anything, the police were under no obligation to inform Ronan Hull. It made a great deal of sense, after all; if a man were to be told that he was under suspicion for such and-such a crime before the police had enough evidence to indict him, he might go out and manufacture some evidence to the contrary. That might not get him off, but it would certainly muddle things up for the police, and cops don't like to have their cases muddled up.

The phone chimed, and Hull flicked it on. The face that appeared on the plate was that of the Public Defender himself.

Another clue, thought Hull.

"Mr. Hull?" said the P. D. "Is there anything I can do to help you?"

"I hope so. Has there been any break in my case, yet?"

The words flashed to Earth by infraphone in something less than one billonth of a second, and the P. D. frowned.

"Not yet, Mr. Hull. We're doing everything we can, of course, but..."

Hull cut him off. "That's all right. I can tell you how much I do know, and maybe that will help you. I know that the police found the body less than an hour after he'd been killed."

The P. D's eyebrows went up. "Then you have discovered that it's murder you'll be charged with. Do you know who it is?"

"Frankly, no." Hull grinned. "I was hoping you'd let it slip, thinking I did know."

The P. D. grinned and shook his head. "Sorry. We get cagey around here after a while. I can confirm what you already know, but I can't give you any information."

"Okay. Call me when it breaks, will you? I'm at the Claymore Hotel, Thoth City, Room 3140. If I'm not here, leave a message; I'll call you back as soon as I return."

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"Very well, Mr. Hull. And don't worry too much."

"I won't. I'm innocent."

"I hope so, Mr. Hull. Goodbye." And his face blanked out.

BUT RONAN HULL didn't need the return call. He knew now. The P. D. had unwittingly given him all the information he needed.

Point One: The news of the death had not yet been broken to the public. That meant that no one knew about it but the police.

Point Two: The Public Defender himself was on the case.

Point Three: The police had found the body less than an hour after death had occurred.

Put them all together.

The P. D. wouldn't be on it unless the dead man were someone important; therefore, someone important had died, and the police had found out about it within an hour. But they had *not* been notified by someone else who had found the body; otherwise, the story would have leaked out by now.

Therefore, they had been notified by some other means.

If a man dies while wearing a pair of Eddam-Schwiller bracelets, the neural connection between them soon fades as the nervous system begins to deteriorate. That fading is enough to bring the cops in a hurry.

And the only man who was important enough to rate such attention, *and* had had some connection with Ronan Hull during the vital forty-eight hours, *and* had been wearing bracelets would be the man who was murdered.

Tedric Smith was dead.

Someone had killed the man who was practically the owner of Mars. Someone had murdered the man who controlled Triple-M.

And the police thought that someone was Ronan Hull.

Ronan remembered one other thing that the P.D. had let slip. He had said: "Then you know it's murder you'll be charged with." He hadn't said: "...are suspected of." He had said: "...*will be charged with.*"

And here he was, on Mars, unable to do a damned thing about it.

IV

"I'M SORRY, sir," said the girl; "we have no one here by that name and description. I'm sure I would have recognized her if I'd seen her."

"I'm sure you would. Thanks anyway." Ronan Hull hung up and cursed at the wall. That was the last hotel in Thoth City. For an hour, he'd been trying to get in touch with Miss Carduelis Carduelis, of Teravis, but the girl seemed to have vanished like a single grain of sand in a desert storm.

Was she the real killer? It

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was possible, but what was her motive?

Who else might have done it? Dr. Dryber? Maybe, but he seemed more like a blowhard than anything else.

Aylinken Joanz? Could be; but, again, there was no visible motive.

Almost anyone at the party might have done it; or it might even be someone who wasn't at the party. Hull, himself, had left around two-thirty in the morning, and Tedric had been alive then. If only he knew the motive, damn it, he could figure out who the killer was.

He couldn't help laughing to himself at that last thought.

Sure, he said to himself, *and if I knew who the killer was, I'd know what his motive was. A real Round Robin.*

THE PHONE chimed, and Hull grabbed at the switch.

The face that appeared was that of F. P. Harwood, of United European Terraforming Engineers, Incorporated.

"I hear you're in a jam, Hull."

Hull nodded. "I seem to be, Mr. Harwood." Harwood was an executive vice-president, and it paid to be pleasant to the man, even if he was a little brusque with underlings.

"Have any idea what it's about?"

"No. None at all," Hull lied. No use giving anything away, not yet.

"Well, it's probably not much, or they wouldn't have let you get to Mars. Have you surveyed that area, yet?" Then he glanced at his watch. "No, you probably haven't had time. I keep forgetting the time difference. Bad enough having time belts here on Earth without having to worry about time belts on Mars."

"Yes, sir," said Hull, waiting for Harwood to get to the point.

"GET IT SURVEYED as soon as possible. Just look it over good, and get photographs. We need to be able to quote a price as soon as possible. We're having a little trouble here."

"Trouble, sir?"

"Yeah. We've had several letters of protest from the Martian Archeological Society. They've been hounding the Government, too. If we're not careful, they'll decide not to pass the Martian Terraforming Bill. It's been defeated twice in the past hundred years, you know. One good thing, though; we haven't heard any opposition from Martian Mining and Manufacturing for a few days. Maybe old Tedric Smith has decided to let us go ahead."

"Yes, sir," said Hull. *Either that, or he's dead,* he added mentally.

"All right, then. Let me know as soon as you've finished."

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"I will, Mr. Harwood. Goodbye."

"Goodbye, Hull." The face was gone again.

THE MAN at the Flyer Rental Service was a brisk, medium-sized chap with an air of businesslike heartlines about him.

"Hello, there, Mr. Hull! Glad to see you back! Going back to the Isis country again?"

Hull shook his head. "Nope. One look at that told me we'd never be able to use an equatorial setup to terraform this old ball of mud. That's mostly desert sand out there, and we'd have to do too much bracing to counteract the Coriolos forces. We'll have to use the polar method."

"I see," he said, indicating that he didn't. "Well, we can fix you right up with a flyer. Say, I understand that some Sirian company is trying to outbid you boys for the job—that is, if the terraforming bid passes." He went right on talking while he led Ronan Hull over to the spot where the flyers were parked.

"So I hear," Hull said. "Have they had any of their men surveying around Isis?"

"Not that I know of. Not a very hospitable country out there. Mister Smith went out there a few months back, though, and..."

"Smith? Tedric Smith?" Hull interrupted. "He didn't rent a flyer from you did he."

"MISTER SMITH? 'Course not; he has his own flyer. But he brings it around to us for maintenance.

"Anybody else head out that way that you know of?"

"Two others. I don't remember their names. That was some months back, though. Well, here's your flyer, sir. All charged up and ready to go."

Hull patted the metallic sheen of plasticoid that was the shell of the flyer. "Looks like a powerful little buggy."

"She is, sir. We've got a brand new Saulton battery in her. You know their motto."

Hull nodded and winced. "'Only the most powerful are charged with a Saulton battery,'" he quoted. Then he paused. "I don't suppose you could find out the names of those other men who went out to Isis country, could you?"

"I'd have to look them up in the book. Come on over to the office. You'll have to sign it, and I'll let you take a look at the other names if you want. It's supposed to be public record, anyway."

RONAN HULL went to the office, signed for the flyer, and leafed back through the pages until he came to the names of those who had signed out for a trip to Isis. Under the heading *Destination*, the word *Isis* had been written only twice in the past nine years. One of the names

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was unfamiliar: James Borrwitt. But Ronan Hull knew the other name very well indeed.

There, in a pinched scrawl, was the signature of Dr. Wilm Drybar.

Hull repeated the name aloud.

"Oh, yes," said the rental man. "I remember him now. Said he came from Aldebaran, I think. Short, fat, real pale face."

"That's him," said Hull. "Well, thanks a lot. I'll pick the flyer in an hour—soon as I eat."

RONAN HULL was a good fifteen minutes out of Thoth City, headed north toward the pole, before he let his curiosity get the better of him. He had to make the survey, but it would simply have to wait.

"Isis, dear old thing," he said, "I come to greet you."

He twisted the wheel to the west and headed for the Great Isis Desert. Then he leaned back and watched the reddish landscape skim by beneath him and listened to the whisper of the thin wind over the streamlined hull of the flyer.

His pressure suit hung limply on him, and his spherical helmet was open in front to allow him to smoke; but he was ready to use the suit as soon as he landed. He needed the suit to walk around in outside the domed cities; Martian air at normal pressure isn't easy to breathe.

It was a good thing he had the suit on. Two hours out of Thoth, something exploded in the engine compartment and blew the front of the hull open.

The flyer lurched and spun as the air resistance increased a thousandfold against the torn nose of the craft. Ronan Hull was thrown violently against the restraining straps. There was a rending sound as the canopy blew off.

Automatically, the helmet sealed itself; the pressure suit inflated as Hull grabbed at the controls and tried to get the flyer on an even keel.

FOR A FULL thirty seconds, the little vehicle bucked in the air, slowing rapidly from her original five-hundred-mile an hour velocity. Only the tremendous strength of the ship and the protective devices within it saved Ronan Hull from a messy, sticky conclusion.

But finally it slowed to drifting speed, and Hull took a deep breath. Then he looked over the side. The flyer was moving at ten, maybe fifteen miles an hour, just coasting with the slight breeze, less than a thousand feet above the surface of Mars.

Ronan tried the antigrav controls and swore. They were jammed. The ship's antigravity unit was still holding it at the level for which

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he'd set it, and he couldn't lower the craft to the ground.

"You, friend Hull," he told himself, "are in one hell of a jam." Even under Martian gravity, a fall of a thousand feet would be fatal.

Maybe he could loosen the antigrav controls from the inside.

Holding on carefully, he clambered out of the cockpit and looked into the jagged hole in the nose. It was quite obvious what the bomb had been intended for. It had been placed next to the battery. If all the energy in that Saulton battery had been released when the bomb went off, the whole flyer would have been vaporized. But the thick casing of the battery had protected it better than whoever had planted the bomb had bargained for. It was badly dented, but it had held.

"I think," said Hull aloud, "that someone doesn't want me around."

Then, quite suddenly, a shadow came over him.

HE JERKED his head around and looked up. Floating several feet over his head, moving erratically in the slight breeze, was a medium transport flyer.

He crouched there, helpless. If the were going to kill him, there was nothing he could do.

The door in the side of the ship opened. Hull realized that it wasn't the bigger vehicle that was moving erratically, it was his own disabled vessel.

A head appeared in the door, a beautiful face capped with a crown of bright yellow feathers.

"Are you all right?" asked Miss Carduelis Carduelis. Her voice, which had been a throaty contralto on Earth, was now a clear soprano because of the thin air. She wasn't wearing a pressure suit. With those lungs, Hull realized, she didn't need to.

"I'm okay," Hull said. Then he waved his arms. The speaker diaphragm didn't carry sound too clearly.

"I can't get any closer," she said. "Your flyer is rocking too much." She disappeared inside the transport for a moment, then reappeared with a metal-web rope ladder. "Catch this," she called.

The rope ladder flapped and twisted downward. Ronan and Hull made a couple of grabs at it, but it was just out of reach. Finally, he tensed his muscles, and leaped toward it. Under the lighter pull of Mars, he made the long jump easily, and began to clamber up towards the open port.

THE GIRL let him in and closed the port after him. "We need some pressure in here," she said. "At this altitude, the air is much too thin for me, even."

She *was* gasping a little,

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Hull noticed; her chest was heaving from the exertion. It was worth noticing.

When the pumps had filled the ship again with denser air, Ronan opened his helmet. "How the hell did you happen along at such an opportune time?"

"We followed you," said Carduelis candidly.

"You didn't plant that bomb, by any chance, Goldilocks?"

She looked hurt. "How can you think that?"

"Hell," said Hull, "I don't know what to think. Why did you just happen to follow me?" Then he added: "And who is 'we'?"

"My brother. Come."

Hull followed her into the control cabin, where a barrell-chested, shaven-headed young man sat behind the wheel. He grinned and took Hull's hand as Carduelis said: "Ronan Hull, this is my brother, Corvis. He is the one who saw the man put the bomb in your ship."

"*Who,* for Heaven's sake?"

"The archeologist," said Corvis. "Dr. Dryber. I saw him put something in the engine compartment, but I didn't think much of it, not at the time. I was trying to rent this flyer, and while I was talking to the man, I saw the little fat one put the package in the motor of your flyer."

"THAT MUST have been while I was eating," Hull said thoughtfully. "But why did you decide to follow me?"

"I told my sister about it, and she knew right away that there was something wrong."

"I remembered that he didn't like you," Carduelis said. "I remembered his calling you a..." She repeated the phrase.

Hull nodded. "I wonder why he came to Mars. Was he wearing these?" He held up his wrists.

"No," said Corvis.

"Damn!" said Hull. "Evidently nobody but me is suspected in this case!"

"What case?" The two Teravins asked in chorus.

"You mean you don't know anything about it? Then why did you avoid me on the *Sky Princess?*" He directed the question at the girl.

She smiled. "We don't want the police to know we are even interested in the terraforming of Mars, so I stayed away from you while the Inspector was there."

"Oh? And how did you disappear so easily in Thoth City?"

"That was easy," she said, tossing her head. "Everyone was looking for a girl with yellow feathers on her head. But I have a brunette wig that looks very good on me."

"Joy, joy, joy. This thing gets more confusing every minute."

"Don't worry," Corvis said, "we'll get you back safely.

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Or would you rather go on to Isis?"

"Isis," said Ronan Hull. "There is something out there that I want to take a look at."

"What?" asked the girl.

"I wish I knew, sweetheart; I wish I knew."

CHAPTER V

THE TRANSPORT could make better time than the little flyer Hull had been handling. At eight hundred miles an hour, it reached the edge of the Great Isis Desert in a little more than eighty minutes. Hull knew exactly what part he wanted to look at; there was only one section that would have been of interest to Dr. Dryber.

"There it is," he said finally, pointing down and to the left. "There are some ancient ruins down there, remains of an old Martian city. Set her down near there."

As the ship slowed and came closer, Ronan Hull became less sure of himself. "Funny. It looks different from the way it looked the last time I was here. But there's that tower rock, and . . ." He stopped. "Oh. I see. There's been a sandstorm since then. It's uncovered more of the buildings. Set the ship down Corvis."

He put the helmet of his pressure suit on, and Corvis slowly bled air out of the flyer. The lessened pressure didn't bother either of them a bit.

The three of them got out and started prowling around through the jagged walls of ruins, looking for something, anything, maybe nothing.

IT WAS RONAN HULL himself who found and recognized what they were looking for.

The ancient city had been built against a high sandstone cliff—a hundred feet or so, which is high for Mars. The base of the precipice was a part of the wall of one building which had been uncovered in one of the rare Martian sandstorms. Hull saw a glitter in the rays of the diminutive sun and walked to the base of the cliff.

There, imbedded in the sandstone, was a glittering bit of crystal the size of a man's thumb. Hull scraped at it and took it out. It was a perfect, blue-white, octahedral diamond.

"What is it?" asked Carduelis.

Hull told her casually. "They're used in the paragravity unit of flyers, spaceships, and terraforming machines," he added, while he surveyed the rock face for signs of other glittering telltales. There were others.

"Well, let's get back to Thoth City," he said. "We've found what we came for."

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"Someone hid that diamond here, eh?" Corvis asked.

"Yeah. Someone put it there a long time ago."

"I DIDN'T know that those things were needed in a flyer," the girl said as they trudged back through the sand to the transport.

"Most people have never seen one," Hull admitted. "The ones in a flyer are no bigger than the head of a pin."

"I remember reading something about that," Corvis said. "They're made in a pressure bomb. Quite cheaply, too."

"Yeah," said Hull. *But stones this size aren't cheap,* he added to himself.

They were less than a hundred yards from the ship when they heard a sudden rush of air overhead.

They looked up to see a huge ship bearing the symbol of the System Police on its side. A voice from a loudspeaker said: "All three of you get your hands in the air and don't move. We're coming down."

The ship began to drop.

"Even the cops are lying to me these days," said Hull in resignation. He had recognized Inspector Quester's voice.

INSPECTOR QUESTER looked at Ronan Hull through the bars of the cell and said: "Certainly I'm willing to listen. But you've got to admit it looks pretty bad for you. You were the only one who knew *where* those diamonds were and *what* they were."

"I'm trying to tell you that I didn't *know;* I just played a hunch. Now, you've charged me with the murder of Tedric Smith; all I ask is a chance to prove that I didn't do it."

Quester sighed. "Okay; I've done my best. I don't know what you said to the Public Defender, but he contacted the Public Prosecutor, and between the two of them they managed to get your character witness. We've got all three of them on a conference hookup in the communications room. Come along."

"How about Dr. Dryber? I hope you nailed him."

"We've got him," Quester said as he unlocked the door.

HULL FOLLOWED him down the hallway to the communications room and through the door. Inside, he found Corvis and Carduelis sitting on one side of the room and Dr. Dryber sitting on the other. Carduelis was glaring at the little archeologist.

Along one wall were three infraphone plates which reflected the images of the Public Prosecutor, the Public Defender, and, lastly, the face of Aylinken Joanz.

The P.D. spoke first. "Mr. Hull, I've explained to Mr.

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Joanz that you need the testimony of a terraforming engineer, and he said he'd be glad to help. You can proceed with your case."

Hull was nervous, but he kept it under control. He stuck a cigaret in his mouth, lit it, and said: "Do you have that piece of rock, Inspector?"

Quester handed it to him. Hull walked over to Dr. Dryber and held it up. "Do you know what this is, Doctor?"

Dryber's pudgy face was filmed with perspiration. He looked at the crystal carefully and swallowed. "No. Just a piece of glass, I suppose."

"Have you ever seen anything like it before?"

"Never. Not to my recollection."

Then Hull went around to each of them in turn, the Teravins, Quester, the P.P., and the P.D. None of them had ever seen anything like it before except the Teravins, who had been told what it was.

AYLINKEN, however, nodded when he looked at it. "That's a crystal for the paragravity unit of a terraforming machine."

"Thanks, Aylinken." Ronan Hull looked at all of them in turn. "It's not surprising that none of you recognized it. When a diamond gets this big, it is worth something like half a million kilos. Small ones are easy to make, but the big babies are much harder. They have to be so nearly perfect that the cost goes up as the cube of their weight. Natural diamonds won't do; they're never perfect enough. A stone with even a small flaw in it will set up eddy currents in a peegee field that will wreck everything for miles around."

He tossed the stone back to Inspector Quester. "Here. You may need that later.

"Now, Mr. Prosecutor, I understand that there was certain documentary evidence found near Smith's body."

"That is correct. I'm not at liberty to disclose it, however," said the prosecutor from the infraphone.

"It related, I believe, to his having found this cache of diamonds in the Isis desert."

"That's right."

HULL TURNED to Dr. Dryber. "It may interest you to know, Doctor, that the precious Martians you think so much of actually had something on the ball after all. They must have had a method of making artificial diamonds, because there are more of these stones imbedded in the loose sandstone of that cliff. They've been there for something like eighty thousand years."

Dryber gasped and blinked, but said nothing.

"The thing was," Hull continued, "that Tedric Smith was not the only person who knew that hundreds of millions of kilos worth of dia-

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monds were out in an easily accessible spot in the Isis. Someone else had been out there, too."

He paused while everyone looked at everyone else.

"You see, the thing that bothered me was motive. I couldn't see what the motive could have been. Terraforming Mars couldn't have been it, since killing Smith would affect that, one way or another. The Government would take Triple-M into account no matter who headed it.

"My best bet, I decided, was Dr. Dryber. He's a fanatic; he'd do anything to keep Mars from being terraformed. I knew he'd had a quarrel with Tedric Smith; and when I found out that he was the one who had put the bomb in my ship, I was almost sure.

"But when I came across the diamonds, I wasn't so sure any more. Motive. What was the motive?

"Then, when Inspector Quester arrested me, it suddenly hit me. The police thought *I* had a motive! The whole thing began to make sense."

HE LEVELED his finger at Quester. "You, Friend Cop, knew good and well that I was coming to Mars. So you let me—you even let me talk you into it. Why? Because you thought I'd give myself away by going straight to the diamond cache."

Quester nodded. "That's right. And I call that pretty good figuring."

"Accident," said Hull. "But your arresting me told me one thing. You knew that the diamonds were there! That meant that Tedric's murder must somehow hinge on the diamonds because they supplied the motive you suspected me of having.

"Very well, then; if the diamonds were the motive, who else would have that motive? Someone who knew the diamonds were there, obviously. And that pretty well narrows it down, because those diamonds were buried for eighty thousand years before a sandstorm uncovered them, a few months ago."

"That's right," Quester interrupted. "And we can prove that the only two people who have been out there—except Tedric Smith, of course—were you and Dr. Dryber. And you, yourself, have proved that Dryber probably wouldn't know a terraforming-type peegee diamond from a busted gin bottle."

"Correction, my dear learned detective. There was one other person. A Mr. James Borrwitt."

QUESTER shrugged. "We found the name, but it doesn't mean anything."

"It might be an alias."

"It might be," agreed Quester. "In fact, it probably is, since we can't find any trace of a James Borrwitt,

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But why would a man concoct up an alias for a crime *before* he had any motive for it? If Borrwitt is your man, why did he give a phony name before he found the diamonds? Prescient, I suppose?"

"Not exactly. Let's drop that for a moment and go on to something else. I presume that I was p i c k e d as a suspect—as the prime suspect—because I had been out there and knew where the diamonds were?"

"Obviously," said Quester, boredly.

"But I can prove that when I went out there, the sandstorm hadn't occurred yet; I can prove that the stones were still covered!"

"Just a minute!" snapped the voice of the Public Defender from the infraphone. "As your defense attorney, I warn you not to give too much evidence to the prosecution!"

"THIS WON'T hurt a thing, Mr. Defender," Hull assured him. "You see, when I went over that area, it was for the purpose of surveying it as a likely spot to sink our terraforming equipment, using the equatorial attack. I took photographs of the whole area. They are on file, and dated. They show that the sand still covered that city. And since that was the only other time I have been to Mars, it was the only time those photos could have been taken."

"There goes your case, Quester," said the prosecutor sourly.

Quester frowned and kept his mouth shut.

"Go on, Mr. Hull," said the P. D. gleefully, "you're doing fine."

Hull dropped his cigaret into a disposal chute. "Unless I'm mistaken, Quester reasoned this way—correct me if I'm wrong, Inspector—: I found the diamonds and kept my mouth shut, hoping to come back and get them out before anyone else found them. Them Tedric Smith found them. Presumably, I found out, at the party, that he knew about them, so I killed him to keep his mouth shut. Right?"

QUESTER nodded. "We also found that you reported the site unfit for sinking a terraforming unit, and suggested the polar attack i n s t e a d. That seemed as though you were trying to draw attention f r o m the site."

"Logical," said Hull. "But why didn't I just file a claim on the territory. That would have been legal, and would have kept Tedric Smith out of it without necessitating murder."

"Because it would have looked damned queer to your employers, United European Terraforming. They would have disputed it on the

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grounds that you were working for them when the survey was made; they'd have won the case—and the diamonds, which they could certainly use."

"Correct! Right down to the last comma! Quester, you are a positive genius!"

Quester growled something under his breath which sounded startling similar to the phrase of Dr. Dryber's, which Carduelis was so fond of quoting.

"THERE WAS one other thing that puzzled me," Hull said. "I wondered what these two from Teravis were doing here. Carduelis seemed interested in terraforming, but she didn't seem to want her activities noticed too much. And her brother stayed completely out of sight; with a wig on, he could pass as an Earthman—and he did, right here on Mars, while his sister was contacting Tedric on Earth. Could Corvis have been our mysterious Mr. James Borrwitt?"

"Hardly," said Ronan Hull before Corvis could protest. "If he had been living under the dome all this time, he'd have come down with some sort of lung infection by now. Even ten pounds of pressure is too much for all those months. Besides, neither he nor his sister recognized that diamond when they first saw it."

Then he turned back to the trio of infraphone plates. "The story is very simple, now that we've eliminated everything that isn't true. The killer was someone who had reason to assume a phony name, in order to survey that site in the Isis desert. He was someone who would recognize a peegee diamond. He was someone who could *not* file a claim on it because the company he worked for would break the claim. Why did you kill Tedric Smith, Aylinken?"

AYLINKEN didn't even look startled. He had quite obviously seen it coming.

"You're right, of course," he said. "I found the diamonds when I made the survey for Sirian Terraforming. I used an assumed name because the company didn't want it known that they were trying to get the job until we'd made a full survey.

"I knew I couldn't file claim on the stones myself, and I knew that the company wouldn't give me much of a cut if I turned the find over to them. So I went to Tedric. He went out, took a look, and then offered me ten thousand kilos to keep my mouth shut."

Joanz laughed bitterly. "Hell, Sirian Terraforming would have given me ten times that. So, that night at the party, after you left, I told him that he'd either give me half or I'd turn the whole

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thing over to Sirian Terraforming and he'd get nothing." He paused and looked into Hull's eyes.

"You were right when you said that Tedric would never let friendship stand in the way of business and vice versa. He took a gun out of his desk drawer; he was going to kill me for the diamonds. With his money and resources, he might have gotten away with it. I jumped him, and the gun went off. That's all."

There was a long silence around the room. Then Aylinken added: "I didn't know they'd pinned the killing on you, Hull; I'm sorry."

"WHAT WILL they do to him?" Carduelis asked. She and Hull were sitting at a table in the cocktail room of the Claymore Hotel, along with her brother, Corvis.

"Not much, actually," Hull said. "He can pretty well prove that it was self-defense; all they can get him for is failing to report a justifiable homicide. I imagine that Sirian Terraforming will take care of that, since they'll need him to prove that they have a claim on the diamonds. They'll get some high-priced legal talent to get him off lightly. He's not really a criminal."

"I know," the girl agreed. "But both your companies are going to be disappointed that the Martian Terraforming Bill isn't going to pass."

"It isn't?"

Corvis chuckled. "I think you're outnumbered. Triple-M is against it; the Archeologists are against it; and Teravis is against it."

HULL NODDED. "I get it. The only purpose of Terraforming is to make a planet fit for human beings to live on."

"Exactly," said the girl. "And we of Teravis are human, after all. But we're perfectly suited to Mars. Of course, there will be a *little* work to be done. This old mudball needs water."

"That we can supply."

"The guy I can't get over is that Dr. Dryber," said Corvis. "How could anyone be so nutty as to want to kill a man to preserve a few old artifacts?"

The girl sniffed. "Anyone who would say—" She repeated the phrase again. "—is obviously crazy." She pushed empty glasses across the table to her brother. "Go get us some more drinks."

Corvis picked up the glasses and rose to his feet. As he did so, he said the phrase over slowly. Then he looked at Hull blankly. "I don't think a person could do it."

As he walked away toward the bar, Carduelis looked at Hull. "He's right. *One* person couldn't do it." Her eyes were bright.

"I see what you mean," said Ronan Hull.

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SQUEE

By Margaret St. Clair

(illustration by MURPHY)

There was hope for humanity only if men had learned one lesson—that some things must not be done, even to win. Had they learned?

THEY SLEPT with their feet in each other's faces, and breathed the same air over and over again. Except for Neil's laboratory, which was well-lighted (Thomas Neil, the son of old sex-linked-virus Neil), they lived in a perpetual twilight. They never had quite enough to eat, and the water they drank came from the distillation of their own catabolic wastes. For these and other bitterer causes, they were acutely irritable. A dozen quarrels flared up a day. They had been living like this for nearly three years now, and they would have to go on living like this for at least a year more, until the time when they got back to Earth. When. If.

It was Jacobsen who kept them sane. He was a natural clown and mimic, a big, good-natured, imperturbable man who could play a zither like a professional musician. Jacobsen had a gift for drawing the quarrels of the others on himself and dissipating them harmlessly, in the way that a lightning rod grounds the big bad voltage from the

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sky with no damage to anybody. They couldn't have got along without him. He was also a brilliant and profound mechanic—an aptitude for whose display the almost-powerless landing they were going to have to make on earth would give ample opportunity.

IF IT WAS Jacobsen who kept them sane, it was Neil the ship was run for. His laboratory was the one well-lighted, well-aired, roomy place. This wasn't because they liked him. They only saw him for thirty minutes a day, at meals, but he would easily have won in a contest for the most hated man on the ship; and on top of that they regarded him with a sort of loathing, because of whose son he was. But they hoped he might be able to undo some of the damage his father had done. They hoped he might be able to get them out of the predicament they, and everybody else, were in. They knew he was a first-class cytologist. They hoped.

"What's Neil trying to do, anyway?" Adams asked one day, when he and Venner had been playing *Go* in the dimness for as long as they could stand. He had asked the question a number of times before, during the years they had been in space; and he would undoubtedly ask it several times more before they got home. Three years with the same shipmates makes conversation repetative.

"Well, I'm no biologist," Venner answered. He pushed the *Go*-board aside and crossed his fingers over his lean diaphragm. "But as I understand it, he's trying to make a sort of artificial ovum, an artificial human egg." It was the answer he always made when Adams asked about Neil's work.

"An artificial egg? How could he possibly do that? How can he turn a sperm into a human egg?"

"THAT'S the million-dollar question," Venner replied heavily. His stomach rumbled. "But here's the way it was explained to me: A spermatozoon has all the chromosomes an ovum has; in a sense, it's an ovum stripped down, an ovum without any albumen and with the minimum of cytoplasm possible. A mature sex-cell—a gamete—has been through a—a reduction division, and so has only half the number of chromosomes found in the ordinary body cells. That ordinary number is what they call the diploid number. A mature spermatozoon, or a mature ovum, has the haploid number.

"After fertilization occurs, the zygote has the full number of chromosomes characteristic of the animal's body cells.

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It's diploid again. All clear so far?"

"More or less."

"Well, now, suppose you could get two sperms to, unh, sort of anastomose. Suppose you could supply this new cell—remember, it now has the *diploid* number of chromosomes—with albumen, and the same sort of cytoplasm an ovum has. What you'd have would be essentially a zygote, a fertilized egg."

"Unh. Why not work with spermatozoa *before* the reduction division takes place? Then you'd have your diploid number of chromosomes without worrying about getting two sperms to snuggle up to each other and become one."

"You could, but it won't work. The cells aren't ripe enough; they just die. I guess the point is that with anything as complicated as a human being, you have to get the extra set of chromosomes from outside the same cell. It has to be a little bit like fertilization."

"IF YOU CAN call another spermatozoon 'outside'. Or—why don't they try surrounding a mature sperm cell with cytoplasm and so on, and then let it be fertilized by another sperm? Wouldn't that work?"

"Neil—he spent all of ten minutes talking to me on this subject once—Neil said that a mature unastomosed sperm seems almost to fight off any attempt to surround it with cytoplasm. The way he put it was, it insists on remembering that it's a sperm."

"I wish his old man had remembered it."

Venner laughed dutifully. "It helps to get the two sperms to anastomose if the cell wall is a little bit flaccid," he said. "That's why Neil has been doing so much work on sperms from men who have cancer of the testes. They produce cells that are abnormal in a promising way."

"Is that so!" For the first time in the routine conversation, Adams sounded sharply interested. "Why didn't you tell me? I never heard that before. Why am I always the last one to know things on this ship? Anything interesting, you don't tell *me*."

"I only heard it a couple of days ago, from Clancy. I thought you'd heard, too. For Lord's sake, don't get so worked up."

"You're lying," Adams said flatly. "Creep around behind my back and then try to lie out of it, will you? You..."

VENNER pushed the *Go*-board aside and confronted him. Both men were breathing heavily. From the upper bunk where he was sitting—Clancy slept under him

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—Jacobsen twanged a burst of notes on his zither.

"Ain't no sense,
Sittin' on a fence.
Lone little sperm in the moonlight,
It's insane,
Strollin' down the lane,
Lone little sperm in the moonlight."

The tension in the cabin dropped abruptly. After a moment, both men laughed.

Venner sat down again. Adams stooped and began picking up *Go*-pieces from the floor. "Can it be done?" he asked when he had them all back on the board.

"Making an artificial egg? That time he talked to me, Neil said it was about trying to lift yourself up by your bootstraps while you have a hundred-pound weight tied on each foot. But I think he's hopeful; human sperms seem quite tolerant of albumen derived from Ganymedean insect eggs."

"Things work out funny, don't they," commented Adams. "Who'd ever have thought, when they sent out the robot rockets to the further planets before ...*it* happened, that soil cores from Ganymede would turn out to be useful. But there it is."

"Yeah... Old sex-linked-virus Neil's son. But I suppose he knows what he's doing. By sending him along, they saved a couple of years in working on the problem. The insects whose eggs he's been using aren't at all those that were in the soil core the robot rocket brought back. The ones, I mean, that first attracted the biologists' attention to Ganymede. Those were a sort of scale insect, parasitic on Ganymedean lichens. What Neil's using now is something more like a sow bug. If he hadn't been along, we wouldn't have known what insects to collect."

JACOBSEN was playing again on his zither. He was touching the strings in a way that gave the instrument almost the resonance of a guitar. It was a song he had played once or twice for them before, sad and romantic, called *A Border Incident*.

The music had turned their thoughts in a less scientific direction. Half-guiltily—he knew it was a forbidden topic—Venner said, "You know, I was married."

"You were lucky," answered Adams, who had been too young to have a wife.

"Yeah... We weren't awfully close to each other. Oh, she used to ask me what I'd done that day when I got home from work, and I'd tell her. Stuff like that. But it wasn't what you'd call a romantic marriage."

"It was a marriage. You

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were lucky," Adams repeated.

"Unhhunh... We had a couple of kids, a boy and—one of the others, but they were more her kids than they were mine. What I mean is, I never thought of myself as much of a hand for the women. If she'd died in...in the ordinary way, I probably wouldn't have remarried. But now—it's like all the meaning had gone out of life. I don't know what I'm living for."

"Everybody says the same thing," Adams answered. "Even the ones you wouldn't think would miss women much. It's like daylight, I guess. You don't think it matters very much; you can always turn on the electric lights. But if sunlight stops falling on the Earth, it means the end of most terrestrial life."

JACOBSEN was singing to his own accompaniment, the words to the song he had been playing before. "Spanish is the loving tongue," he sang softly, in his warm, pleasant baritone voice. The beautiful, dark, loving girl and the soft words she had taught him. And then the refrain, "Mi amor, mi corazon."

"Stop it, Jacobsen," Venner said after they had listened for a little while. "You'll have crying into our tea in a minute, thinking." There was no unkindness in his voice.

Jacobsen played another verse before he put the zither aside. "Sometimes it's a good thing to think," he said.

It was two days or so after this that Neil, coming in to lunch with the crew, attracted their attention by his air of surpressed excitement. His normal game-cock aggressiveness seemed to have doubled. His small black moustache bristled, his teeth and eyeballs had a gleam like glass. None of them wanted to ask him questions. But by the time the dessert course — one small sweet biscuit per man — was served, they were all watching him.

Neil pushed his chair back and got to his feet. "Captain Ambarzumian," he said formally. "I suggest you break out the stores of medicinal liquor. We have something to celebrate."

Captain Ambarzumian's normally ruddy color had paled. "Please explain yourself, Dr. Neil," he said with equal formality.

"I cannot be quite certain," Neil replied. He paused for dramatic effect. "But I believe—it is my sincere belief—that the future of the race is safe."

THERE WAS a moment of dead silence. Somebody coughed. "The difficulties still to be overcome are enormous," Neil continued. "Get-

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ting something as complicated as a human embryo to go through the later stages of its development *in vitro* is almost impossible. Almost. We will have to work very hard. The first human beings we produce from our artificial egg cells will almost certainly be monsters. But I believe that within fifty years—perhaps even within twenty-five—young human beings like ourselves will again walk the surface of our earth."

Another silence. It was as if they couldn't assimilate what he had told them. Then Jacobsen struck a wild burst of notes on his zither; his face had lit up like a sign-board. *"Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!"* he sang with the full strength of his rich baritone voice.

The leaping exultation of the old words, if not their bellicosity, expressed what they all felt. By the time Jacobsen came to the full-throated chorus, they were all singing.

"Glory, glory, Hallelujah!
Glory, glory, Hallelujah!
Glory, glory, Hallelujah!"

They sang with their heads thrown back, *"The truth is marching on!"*

The song came to an end with another burst of notes from Jacobsen's zither. "First time I ever heard that song really sung," he observed to nobody in particular. "Sung right, I mean."

THE CABIN began to fill with the babble of excited talk. Neil put up his hand as if to stop it. "There's just one thing," he said. "It doesn't bother me, but some people might consider it a drawback. You'd better know about it now." He seemed to have forgotten his suggestion that the captain break out the liquor to celebrate.

"You mean—you said they'd be monsters at first. Will they always be deformed in some way?" Clancy asked. Very softly, Jacobsen played the first few notes of a song that had been popular when the ship had left earth. Its title was *A Cross-Eyed Girl Would Be a Pretty Girl.*

"No, nothing like that. We'll be able to get them straight and well-formed. But I haven't been able—and there are strong theoretical reasons for thinking nobody will ever be able—to produce an artificial human zygote that doesn't contain the X-chromosome."

"We're not cytologists, Dr. Neil," said Captain Ambarzumian. "Please explain yourself."

"Very well." Neil sat down in his place at table again. He seemed to be enjoying himself.

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"ONLY SPERMATOZOA contain the X-chromosome," he said. "Ova do not. If it were possible to get a human ovum before the meiotic division occurred, and induce it to go through its embryonic development to maturity without fertilization, it would give rise to a female.

"Spermatozoa are of two kinds, those which contain the X-chromosome and those which do not. They are produced in the tests in approximately equal quantities. That is why human males and females are born—used to be born—in approximately equal numbers.

"As I said, I have been unable to produce an artificial human zygote that does not contain the X-chromosome. Apparently there is such an antipathy between the cell walls of two sperms, neither of which contains the X-chromosomes, that it is impossible to get them to pair their chromosomes properly. Only X and non-X will pair. Nor does it appear feasible to eliminate the X-chromosome from the zygote after it has come into existence. Any such attempt makes the artificial human fertilized egg break down completely.

"It looks as if our zygotes were all going to have to contain the X-chromosome."

They looked at each other blankly. Neil's words seemed to mean something; they weren't sure what it was. They weren't sure they wanted to know.

"Can't you put it in nontechnical terms, Neil?" asked Captain Ambarzumian. "What does that mean?"

"We'll be able to produce human beings. But they'll all have to be produced from zygotes that contain the X-chromosome. So they'll all be males."

WHAT THEY talked about was whether Neil might be lying. "But why would he lie?" somebody—it might be Venner—would say. "He's a scientist. He wouldn't tell lies in a thing where he'd be caught out."

"Did you see the expression on his face when he was telling us the bad news?" somebody—it was usually Adams—would answer. "He enjoyed it; he likes the idea of a world without women. He could perfectly well be lying. Look whose son he is."

It was during one of these discussions that Adams asked, "What happened to old man Neil, anyhow? I know he's dead, but I never heard the real details. Some people say one thing and some another. I was only twelve when the plague killed...everybody."

"He was torn to pieces by a mob about two months after the last woman in North America died," Venner answered. "I mean, literally

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torn to pieces. The authorities didn't even try to stop the mob; I saw a telecast of his death."

"That must have been good watching," said Adams.

"Well..."

"HE WAS THE worst man who ever lived," Adams said. He turned in his bunk. They all spent a good deal of time in their bunks now; it was as if they didn't have enough energy to sit up. "To kill off all the enemy's women to win a war isn't war; it's murder."

"Of course his idea wasn't to kill all of them," Venner answered. "He was trying—what was that expression they used?—trying to negotiate from a position of maximum strength. If the enemy didn't want all their women killed, they'd have to surrender. Then they'd be given the vaccine.

"They did surrender; but by that time, the virus had mutated in the enemy women's tissues. It was a lot faster and more deadly than it had been; it swept over the whole world. The vaccine wasn't any use against it in its new form, and that was that."

"He was the worst man who ever lived," Adams repeated.

"He was a bad man, certainly," answered Venner, "but he wasn't much worse than a lot of others. That bomb they used to have—they kept on testing it, even though they knew there was a good chance their tests were damaging human germ plasm permanently. They came within an inch of using the bomb in battle. In fact, one of the arguments in favor of bacteriological warfare was that it was more humane."

"Humane," said Clancy.

"That's what they said. No, in the end we're none of us much different from Neil. We're all of us responsible."

ADAMS RAISED himself on one elbow and looked at Venner. "How am I responsible?" he asked. "I was twelve years old at the time of the plague. Twelve years! How am I responsible?"

"We're all of us too agressive," Venner replied. "Have we still learned to take a blow and not strike back, even if striking back means ruining ourselves as well as the enemy? Put it another way. Have we yet learned there are some things you mustn't do even to win?"

Adams made a disgusted noise. "I wish you'd shut up. Be saintly, if you want to. When somebody hurts me, I want to hurt him back. You make me sick."

"I know. That's just it."

AS THE discussions continued, their apathy increased. Finally Ambarzumian

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called Jacobsen in for a conference.

"Can't you do something to cheer them up, Jacobsen?" he demanded. "Play some on your zither. Morale was never this bad before. If they get much more depressed, they'll be making suicide tries."

"I don't feel like cheering anybody up, Sir," Jacobsen said shortly. Since Neil had made his announcement, his big frame seemed to have shrunk in on itself. He looked considerably older and smaller than he had two weeks ago.

"None of us feels very well," Captain Ambarzumian answered, "but we've got to have our full crew to get home at all. When it comes to our landing, even Neil will have his duties. If we're short-handed, landing will be very...difficult."

There was a silence. Then Jacobsen said, without disrespect, "Who cares?"

Ambarzumian was too wise to rebuke him. "We've got to keep hoping," he answered. "Neil's a good man, of course. Brilliant. The Council wouldn't have sent him with us otherwise. But he's not the only cytologist. There's Rausch ... Trenton ... Yee Ching...Scheel. Neil could be wrong; he's got to be wrong. The important thing is getting home with the Ganymedean cell material; then the others can work with it. Teamwork might accomplish a lot. — Look whose son he is."

Jacobsen chewed his lower lip. "Well..."

"You can have anything you want," Ambarzumian told him. "Except the emergency landing stores. Perhaps you could rig up some sort of a toy to divert them. A puzzle machine, for example. Anything like that."

JACOBSEN nodded. He felt the Captain's cabin and went back to the forecastle, where he sat for half a morning, thinking. Then he went to the storeroom and rummaged about. He came out with an assortment of metal parts, the last three big flashlight batteries, and a number of relays and electron tubes. He worked for a long time over them. What he came up with, finally, was the Squee.

He introduced his creation to his shipmates at the end of the short, morose meal they called dinner. He began by emptying a handful of metal nuts into a small dish. When he saw the crew was watching him, though apathetically, he reached under his chair and produced the Squee.

The little robot was about fifteen inches high, housed in a reasonably accurate squirrel-shaped case. (Jacobsen had had to do a lot of hammering to get the curves right.) It

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had two beady eyes that were actually ball-bearings touched with black paint, and a nicely-curled, bushy tail that Jacobsen had gone to a lot of pains to make from some spun-glass insulation. Around its waist there was a full, very abbreviated red skirt that had been the hem of a bandana handkerchief. Considering the difficulties Jacobsen had labored under, it was a thoroughly engaging robot squirrel.

It stood for a moment balanced on its hind paws beside Jacobsen's plate. Then it said—a fair proficiency in ventriloquism was among Jacobsen's talents— "Hello, boys," in a high, squeaky, indubitably feminine voice.

There was a silence. The success of Jacobsen's project —other things, too—hung in the balance. At last Clancy said, "Hello yourself. What's your name?"

"Squee," the robot answered. "And I like nuts. *I like nuts.* I think I'll go get me a nut."

JACOBSEN touched something on the creature's underbelly. It stood for a moment, swaying. Then it bounded lightly over the table to the dish of metal nuts. It picked one up. It turned it between its forepaws. It raced gracefully back across the table to the large box Jacobsen had put by his elbow. It went inside the box and left the nut.

The performance was repeated twice more. Then the Squee halted beside Jacobsen. "I just love nuts," it said in its high voice.

"Will she come for a nut if I hold it out for her?" Clancy asked eagerly.

"Sure, if your nut is nearer than the ones in the dish."

Clancy picked up a nut and pushed the dish to the extreme end of the table. Everyone was smiling. "Here, Squee," he said coaxingly. "Come and get it. Nice nut. Nice nut for Squee."

The robot squirrel seemed to hesitate. She turned her head from side to side. Then she raced toward Clancy, seemed to snatch the nut from his fingers, and bounded back to her box. "Thank you, Clancy," she said in a somewhat muffled voice when she was inside.

Clancy laughed. "Some squirrel," he said warmly.

"*Thank* you, Clancy," came the answer from within the box.

THAT NIGHT their after-dinner discussions turned on something considerably different from the usual weak arguments about Neil's trustworthiness. What they wanted to know was whether the robot was properly known as *the* Squee, or simply Squee. Jacobsen, appealed to, refused

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to commit himself. The discussions grew warm, even heated; but it was plain the participants were enjoying themselves.

Gradually, it became the customary thing for the after-dinner interval to be devoted to the antics of the Squee. With Jacobsen's deft fingers helping, she "learned" to jump to the shoulder of the man who called her (provided he had a metal plate on his shoulder), to roll over, to sit up and beg for nuts. The men themselves suggested extra tricks for her to "learn." Morale was improving amazingly.

For the first two weeks or so, Neil seemed unconscious of the Squee's existence. He still messed with the crew, but even a man as thick-skinned and arrogant as he was must have been aware of the hostility with which they regarded him, and have found it slightly distasteful. At any rate, he always left the table as soon as he had finished chewing his food. One evening, however, he remained in his place and witnessed the Squee's whole performance. When it was over, he said, "Nice little robot, Jacobsen."

JACOBSEN did not answer. Neil continued, in his drawling, rather high-pitched voice, "You know, people's minds are amazing. Here's this robot. It's nothing but a robot, entirely sexless; but because Jacobsen has dressed it up in a red handkerchief, and given a rather hippy character to its locomotion, you're all convinced that it's a she. But if I were to take off its red skirt, and make a couple of changes in the mechanism..." He picked up the Squee and began sliding the red skirt down over the robot's metal flanks.

Jacobsen snatched it away from him. "You let my Squee alone," he said angrily.

"All right, all right," Neil answered, permitting Jacobsen to take the Squee from him. "I was only trying to demonstrate a point."

"Demonstrate it on your..." Jacobsen answered. He was so angry his voice was shaking. "If you want something to play with, go play with your damned chromosomes. Keep your hands off my Squee."

"I won't touch it again, I assure you," Neil said in his mocking voice. He pushed his chair back from the table. "As I said before, people's minds are amazing." He went out.

JACOBSEN continued to "teach" his robot new tricks. The best of them, it was generally agreed, was that she "learned" to rattle a tambourine (made of metal washers loosely riveted to the bottom of a metal biscuit tin) in time to her own singing.

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Since all of Jacobsen's sizeable vocal repetory was at her disposal, she ended by "knowing" a considerable number of songs. Her rendering of *Blow the Man Down* was particularly spirited. She did so many tricks that her red bandana skirt frayed at the edges and had to be replaced with a new one made of blue fabric.

The crew had not even begun to tire of her antics when Jacobsen had another idea. He made a few adjustments in her mechanism; the tempo of her performances slowed down noticeably.

"What's the matter with her?" Clancy demanded when, for the second evening running, the Squee had hardly seemed to notice the nut he held out of her. "She sick or something?"

"I don't think so," Jacobsen responded. There was a slight smile at the corners of his mouth. "But why don't you ask her yourself how she feels?"

"What's the matter, Squee?" Clancy asked. "Aren't you feeling well?"

"Oh, I'm all *right,*" the robot answered. "But—unh..."

THE BLUE skirt switched. The Squee lowered her head and pawed lightly at the table, in a perfect pantomime of coy, embarrassed happiness. "But I may be having a little secret to tell you—I'm not sure—one of these days." She scampered off to her box.

"What's the secret, Jacobsen?" Adams asked eagerly later that evening, when the remains of the meal had been cleared away.

"*I* don't know," Jacobsen answered. He was beaming. "She hasn't told me yet. I guess she'll tell us when she's good and ready." He picked up his zither and began to play *Careless Love* on it. "Well, that's how it is," he sang. He skipped on to the fourth verse. "Now my apron strings won't pin, you pass my door and won't come in. Love, Oh careless Love."

"Yeah, I guess she'll tell us when she's ready," said Adams. His face wore a delighted smiled. "We all know how women are."

THE NEWS—that there was to be news—must have got to Neil somehow. Three nights later, when the dessert was being served, he said abruptly to Captain Amburzumian, "Captain, can't you let me have a little more power for my laboratory? It's important."

The captain frowned. The request should have been made to him in private, instead of in the presence of the crew. "I'm sorry, Dr. Neil," he said stiffly. "There simply isn't more power available. We're already on mini-

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mum rations for the most essential things."

"I only need a few watts. It's for my centrifuge. You see, there's a possibility—perhaps more than a possibility—that I may be able to centrifuge out the X-chromosomes from my artificial ova. Without too much damage to the cell wall, I mean. In that case, the artificial ova would no longer give rise to males. Females could be produced."

"That's—interesting news. But I'm afraid I simply haven't even a few watts."

"I think you have," Neil answered. "What about that thing?" He pointed to the Squee's hutch, which was sitting on the table beside Jacobsen's elbow. "There must be more than a few watts in the batteries for it."

Captain Ambarzumian sat silent. The crew watched him almost without breathing. They all knew what he was thinking. Neil's request might be—very probably was—prompted by malice. He disliked Jacobsen, he hated the Squee. His tight face wore a spiteful little smile. But he might, after all, be on the track of something important. The chance was too great for Ambarzumian to take.

"All right," the captain said at last. "I'm very sorry, Jacobsen. But you'll have to give him the batteries."

In silence Jacobsen fetched a screw driver. He disconnected the big batteries. He put them on the table, still without a word.

Neil picked them up. "Thanks," he said to nobody in particular. Carrying the batteries, he left the cabin. There was triumphant malice in every line of his rigid little back.

THAT NIGHT, Venner had a nightmare. He dreamed that he was standing out of doors, under a lowering sky, while the wind moaned. The sound of the wind grew louder. It began to rain, big icy drops that came out of the sky with an audible plop.

For all the drops were so cold, they were burningly hot when they touched him. He tried to rub them away, but they clung and scalded in. The noise of the wind was rising. And still the rain fell, in big hot drops.

Venner awoke with a start. He rubbed his hands over his face, and found that it was wet and sticky. He could still hear the wind moaning. More frightened than he had been in his dream, he leaped from his bunk and turned on the cabin light.

It was Adams whose breathing had seemed like the wind howling. "What's the matter?" Venner demanded. "Are you sick?"

"...Hurt," Adams said with difficulty. "Get Ambarzumian."

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At a run, Venner routed the captain from his cubicle. Then, urged by an impulse he couldn't have defined, he ran to Neil's laboratory.

THERE WAS blood and broken glassware everywhere. Tables had been overset; the laboratory looked as if everything in it had been stirred with a big stick; there wasn't a flask or test tube unbroken; there was blood high up on the white walls. Neil lay on the floor in blood-soaked pyjamas. He had been beaten about the head until almost the only recognizable feature of his face was his moustache. In his right hand he was holding one of the long-bladed laboratory knives.

Venner turned and ran back to the forecastle. Ambarzumian was bending over Adams. The emergency lights had been turned on.

"What happened" Ambarzumian demanded. "How did you get hurt like this?"

"Neil," the young man answered. "I had to get the batteries back from him."

"Batteries, Why?"

"For the Squee," Adams replied. The breath was rattling in his throat, but he smiled at them. "She had to have them; right now, she's got to have plenty of power."

"Power? What for?" Ambarzumian questioned. He knew, better than the others, what their position now was; he looked sick and old.

"Because..." Adams, bleeding to death, sounded surprised. "Didn't you hear what Jacobsen told us? We've got to be extra careful with her now. Because she's going to have a pup."

ODDLY ENOUGH, the two deaths improved the morale of the crew. Neil had been deeply and bitterly hated; the loss of the Ganymedean cell material seemed to be more than compensated for by the fact of his death. Adams had been popular enough, but his being dead meant a little more comfort in the way of food, air, and living space for the others. The difficulties of a short-handed landing on earth were still so distant in space and time that it was difficult for the crewmen to appreciate them. Since there was no other way to dispose of the bodies, they were fed into the ship's atomic reducers, and added, ultimately, a few extra BTU to the auxiliary fuel supply.

AS THE DISTANCE between the ship and earth lessened, Ambarzumian called Jacobsen in for a series of conferences. He wanted to see what could be done toward modifying the landing gear to make a safe landing a little more possible.

"That's the best I can do,

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sir," Jacobsen said at last.

"Yes. You've tried hard. It's...not too bad."

Jacobsen touched the zither strings lightly. "What do you think our chances of a safe landing are, sir?" he ventured.

"Oh—about fifty-fifty. Maybe a little better than that. Depends a good deal on what sort of upper stratospheric winds we meet." Ambarzumian leaned back in his chair and sighed.

"If we do get down to surface safe, it's going to be hard on the people at home when they learn that we failed. This ship was just about the last hope, and we aren't bringing anything back."

"It's not quite that bad," Ambarzumian answered. He had grown noticeably more gray-haired in the last month. "We've got most of Neil's notes; they'll be valuable. We know that he did succeed in making an artificial human zygote. The next ship to leave earth for Ganymede will start off from a higher level than we did."

"The next ship...Sir, do you think that what Venner said was true? Did we fail because we haven't learned to control our own aggressiveness?"

"It certainly looks that way. Adams loved the Squee. When he felt Neil was endangering her, he struck back at him, even though, by his striking back, he destroyed everything the expedition had accomplished. What you said Venner said about men, generally speaking, is certainly one way of looking at it."

"Yes, but... Suppose we get home safe. Suppose the other cytologists are smarter than Neil was. Suppose the race goes on living. Will we always be that way? Will we never be able to get rid of?"

"How should I know, Jacobsen? I'm only a human being."

There was a long silence. At last Jacobsen began to play the zither lightly. *"Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel? Deliver Daniel?"* he sang softly but indomitably. *"Didn't my Lord deliver Daneil? And why not every man?"*

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SILLY ASSES

A Vignette by Isaac Asimov

NARON of the long-lived Rigellian race was the fourth of his line to keep the Galactic records.

He had the large book which contained the list of the numerous races throughout the Galaxies that had developed intelligence, and the much smaller book listing those races that had reached maturity and had qualified for the Galactic Federation. In the first book, a number of those listed were crossed out; those that, for one reason or another, had failed. Misfortune; biochemical or biophysical shortcomings; social maladjustment, etc., took their toll. In the smaller book, however, no member listed had yet blanked out.

And now Naron, large and incredibly ancient, looked up as a messenger approached.

"Naron," said the messenger. "Great One!"

"Well, well, what is it? Less ceremony."

"Another group of organisms has attained maturity."

"Excellent. Excellent. They are coming up quickly now. Scarcely a year passes without a new one. And who are these?"

The messenger gave the code number of the Galaxy and the coordinates of the world within it.

"Ah, yes," said Naron. "I know the world." And in flowing script, he noted it in the first book and transferred its name into the second—using, as was customary, the name by which the planet was known to the largest fraction of its populace. He wrote: Earth.

He said, "These new creatures have set a record. No other group has passed from intelligence to maturity so quickly. No mistake, I hope."

"None, sir," said the messenger.

"They have attained to thermonuclear power, have they?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, that's the criterion." Naro chuckled. "And soon their ships will probe out and contact the Federation."

"Actually, Great One," said the messenger, reluctantly, "the Observers tell us they have not yet penetrated space."

Naron was astonished. "Not at all? Not even a space station?"

"Not yet, sir."

"But if they have thermonuclear power, where then do they conduct their tests and detonations?"

"On their own planet, sir."

Naron rose to his full twenty feet of hight and thundered, "On their *own* planet?"

"Yes, sir."

Slowly, Naron drew out his stylus and passed a line through the latest addition in the smaller book. It was an unprecedented act, but, then, Naron was very wise and could see the inevitable as well as anyone in the Galaxy.

"Silly asses," he muttered.

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IDOL'S EYE

by Carol Emshwiller

Who'd have dreamed the destiny awaiting Phillipa?

PHILIPPA was on the back steps shelling peas when she heard the sound of footsteps. They didn't make much noise on the dry earth, but Phillipa heard them; and because of the heaviness of them, and the time of day, and the way they came around to the back of the house, she knew who it was.

Her fine black hair already hung down, hiding each cheek, but she shook her head to bring it farther over her eyes in a protective screen. She peered out through the thick lenses of her ill-fitting glasses, but the only thing in focus, as usual, was the comfortable, familiar, black hair before her eyes.

There was the blurred shape of the grey barn, and the hazy, rolling line where the hills stopped and the sky began, and a new, dark shape under the green umbrella of the elm tree looking like every other blurred shape of a man or a woman. About the most Philippa saw of any of them. She knew who it was,

---

Barely two years ago, in the February 1956 issue of *Science Fiction Quarterly*, to be exact, we ran a short-short story entitled "Love Me Again", by one Carol Emshwiller. Some readers knew at once that the lady was the spouse of Artist Ed Emshwiller; others wondered. But the response was positive in either instance. While some have found her stories obscure, the majority feeling is somewhat exaggerated in the words of a reader who urges us never to let her appear elsewhere, stating that, so far, not a single story from her typewriter rates as *low* as merely "first class". Yes—to say this is to exaggerate, but, apparently, not to give a false impression!

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though, and her hands tensed and she shelled peas more rapidly than before.

The shape neared and stood before her. "Hello," he said. "You're looking pretty."

She was used to being the way she was, and she didn't mind any more, not really. It was only the mockery she always felt in him that hurt her, not the words he said. When she answered, she spoke slowly and almost in a whisper. She wanted to say that if he loved her, and really wanted to marry her, he should say that she was what she was; but she didn't think there was really any love for her in him. He would rather see her something different. "I may not see very well," she said, "but I know I'm not pretty."

"You are to me." But she knew these were just words, the kind of words people always said without thinking if they meant anything.

HE SAT DOWN beside her and leaned over her. He was so close she could see his uneven teeth and the bristled mustache above them almost as clearly as she saw her own hair.

"How about a kiss?"

"No," she said, "not now."

She knew he was only saying it to tease her, but still the thought made her turn her head away.

"You've got to sometime, you know."

"Maybe after we're married."

"Maybe! I guess you'd better. Anyway, I'll be the boss then." He laughed a laugh that made her shrink inside and then he got up and went on into the kitchen. She heard him call out to her mother, laugh again and say, "Philippa."

She heard the tail end of her mother's answer... "doesn't know when she's well off", and "...a strange one, Philippa."

During the conversation with him, Philippa had not stopped shelling peas, but now she did.

She looked off to where the green went the highest into the blue of the sky, to Old Hump Back Mountain—no mountain at all, but the biggest hill around—and she thought about being up there on the top, and the breeze there, and the smell of pine and the rustling animal sounds. She thought about it so she would forget about her mother and him inside.

THEN SHE saw it, clearer than she had ever seen anything before. It was almost as if she saw it with the mind's eye as well as with her real eyes. A cloud, but a clear cloud with the billowing shapes within it concisely outlined. It was purple, with a reddish tinge around the edges; it billowed upwards in a funnel shape for almost a

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full minute before it shrank and faded.

I saw it, she thought. *I saw it as clearly as I see my own hair before my eyes.* She shook the hair back, for once impatient with it, and stared at Hump Back Mountain. It was as blurry as ever.

That was seeing, she thought. *That was the way everybody sees, and it's wonderful. Or perhaps it's a special way of seeing—my way.*

And she thought that this was a nice thing to remember and think about; she shelled the peas again and felt happy.

THEY HAD come. This was the place and there must be one somewhere, a special one that was just right. The crystal would tell them.

They came out of the folded loop, Par and Til and Gib.

"We're doing it for the idol," said Par. The others didn't answer, but Par knew.

They set the crystal down on the pine needles, and Gib curled around it to give it what it needed. "This is a nice place in it's way," Gib said before he went "out".

"Were we seen?" Til asked.

"They can't," Par said. "It takes more than eyes sometimes."

"So, it is a nice place, in its way, to be calm and sure in," said Til. They sat and felt the breeze, smelled the pine smell, listened to the rustle of small animals, and waited.

When night came Gib uncurled from the crystal and came "to" again. "One is found," he said, "with what is needed. Shall I call?"

The others didn't answer, because there was no reason, but Gib looked into himself and knew the answer then; he called a slow call that would wait for the right time.

"This is a nice place in its way," Par said. It had been said, but not by Par. And then they all waited again.

HE AND PHILIPPA and her father and mother all sat down to supper at the round table. Philippa said nothing, because she was thinking about how it was to see clearly all the way to the top of Hump Back Mountain. She shook her head till her hair was a curtain from the light above the table and the shining white dishes and the glitter from the knives and forks. All the others talked, but Philippa was lost into herself.

"You were rude tonight," her mother said afterwards, as they washed the dishes together. "You're always rude to him, and he's the only one you'll ever have a chance with. He needs a wife and he's not particular, Lord knows, but maybe he won't even have you if you're this

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way all the time, and then what will you do?"

"I didn't mean to be rude," Philippa said.

"Well I'm warning you, he may not be much but he's your only chance. I don't understand you, Philippa, that you can throw away your only chance. Try to be better when we go out to the front room again. Wake up and don't be so dreamy-like. Men like a girl who notices."

"I'll try."

AND SHE did try, later in the front room, but there was something about him that shut her like a box inside, something about him that made her want to make him fuzzy not only to her eyes, but to her inner eye.

She tried though. She was noticing and kind and because of it he grew bold.

They were on the porch and her mother and father had gone to bed. "I'm going to have that kiss," he said. "I've waited as long as an engaged man can."

"Please not now."

"Look, Philippa, I need a woman, like you can't even think how I need one. Look," he leaned close and held her arm in a bruising grip, "they brought Lucky Lady over to the Prince today. Did you hear him bellow down to the pasture?"

Philippa tried to lean away, but he held her arm tightly just below the shoulder. "I'm like the Prince," he said, "just like the Prince, I could bellow."

His hand pulled at her other shoulder in a kind of clumsy caress, coaxing her to turn to him. "We're going to be married, you know. It doesn't matter now. We can do anything." Then he pulled her hard against him. "For God's sake push back that hair," he said.

A few minutes later, Philippa managed to twist from his grip. She ran rapidly through the dark front room to the hall and the stairs. She had no need of sight, here in her home, and the dark was comfortable. He stumbled after, bumping into the small table by the door and cursing the noise he made. He dared go no farther than the stairs and by that time Philippa was in her room. She heard his heavy steps on the porch as he left, and she waited by her window until the crunching sounds on the stony earth of the driveway were gone.

She lay on her bed, and she could neither think nor sleep; but she knew that she could not marry him, in spite of her mother and father. Now she had decided that.

The hours went by rapidly for her because she had so much confusion in her mind, but finally she dozed.

SHE WAS in an orchard in a valley and the fruits on the trees were pink and ripe,

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because it was a holy time. There were creatures around her, unclear creatures that she saw more clearly even than she had seen the purple cloud that evening over Hump Back. The creatures came to the orchard because they loved. They loved to eat the pink fruit and they loved, in this holy season, to worship the idol here where he lived.

Then she saw him and she loved him, too, because she could see more than him.

One shoulder was higher than the other and one arm was shriveled. He had lost both feet at the ankles, and a scar lumped across his forehead. Philippa saw all this, but mostly she saw his strange, blind eyes and what lay behind them. She saw him, inner eye to inner eye.

Then one of the creatures handed her a pink fruit. It had a strange taste, neither sweet nor bitter. The sweetness was more sweet because of this, and she ate it.

SHE WOKE and remembered the grasping hands and the brutal kiss of the night before, but it was like a memory of a long time ago that didn't matter any more. A lot of things didn't matter now, for something new was inside her.

She came down to the kitchen. No one else was yet up. She made the coffee and drank some and ate an orange. She savored the sweetness of the orange and the bitterness of the coffee. *These are the tastes of my home,* she thought, *my home and my land,* and she loved the tasting. But she had a strange new taste in her mind that had a new meaning.

Her father came down and they went out to the morning milking, not speaking. Father and daughter, a disappointing, ugly, half-blind daughter; but still, in the early morning going to milk the cows, they were father and daughter.

Later in the morning, she took the garden claw and weeded the vegetable patch; then she squatted down to pick green beans for lunch. The hot sun made sweat bead along her upper lip and dampen the back of her blouse. *This is the hot sun of my land*, she thought, and loved her sweating.

After lunch she asked her mother, "Can I go for a while?" for now was the time.

"There's a lot to be done," her mother said, and then she thought that this was her daughter, who had so little. "But go on; there's nothing that won't wait."

"Goodby," Philippa said.

She went out and a half an hour later she stood just where Hump Back Mountain started from the valley floor. She took off her glasses and laid them on the ground. She pushed her hair back, showing

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her large, staring eyes and broad nose and then she started walking through the pines towards the top of the hill.

ONCE THE generals and the politicians and the scientific experts had searched the Earth and found six strong, healthy men—trained and intelligent men—and one of them was also a truly kind and good man with some said, a way of seeing into people. And they had sent him with the others, out in one of the six new ships built to leave the solar system. "Most of you won't come back," they said.

Some of the ships crashed, and some never got to any place that was a place, and they never heard of the men again, nor of him.

And because of what he was inside, the creatures of a strange world had planted an orchard and built a holy gate; they had seen the answer to the question he never asked, and had come where they would never venture before to find him a worthy wife.

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SCIENCE FICTION ALMANAC

The dates listed are those that appeared on the magazines, rather than the dates when they appeared on the newsstands.

JANUARY

1928: *Amazing Stories Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 1; (Winter) large size; Hugo Gernsback, editor.

1930: *Astounding Stories of Super Science;* pulp size; monthly; Harry Bates, editor. (The first few issues mixed weird and supernatural material with science fiction.)
(marginal) *Scientific Detective Monthly*, Vol. 1, No. 1; large size; Hugo Gernsback, editor.

1932: *Astounding Stories* returns to original title of 1930.
Amazing Stories starts experiment with symbolic covers.
(marginal) Final issue of *Ghost Stories*, Vol. 11, No. 4.

1933: Final issue of *Wonder Stories Quarterly* (Winter 1933) Vol. 4, No. 2.
(marginal) Final issue of *Strange Tales*, Vol. 3, No. 1.

1938: John W. Campbell, Jr. now editor of *Astounding Stories.*

1939: *Startling Stories*, Vol. 1, No. 1; pulp size; bi-monthly; Mort Weisinger, editor.

1940: *Captain Future*, Vol. 1, No. 1; pulp size; quarterly; Mort Weisinger, editor.
Thrilling Wonder Stories starts monthly schedule.
Fantastic Adventures starts monthly schedule.
(marginal) Dorothy McIlraith now editor of *Weird Tales.*

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1942: *Astounding Science Fiction* now large size.
1946: *Amazing Stories* returns to monthly schedule.
1949: *Super Science Stories* (Popular Publications) revived; pulp size; bi-monthly; Elijer Jacobson, editor.
1950: Howard Browne now editor of *Amazing Stories*
1951: Final issue of *Fantasy Book* (No. 8).
(marginal) *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* starts experiment in semi-slick format.
1952: *Startling Stories* starts monthly shedule.
Future combined with Science Fiction Stories becomes *Future Science Fiction Stories.*
Final issue of *Avon Science Fiction Reader* (No. 3).
(marginal) Final issue of *Avon Fantasy Reader* (No. 18).
(marginal) Final issue of *Suspense,* Vol. 1, No. 4.
1953: (marginal) *Avon Science Fiction and Fantasy Reader,* Vol. 1, No. 1; digest size; quarterly; Sol Cohen, editor.
1954: Final issue of *Dynamic Science Fiction,* Vol. 1, No. 6
1955: *Science Fiction Stories* starts bi-monthly schedule.
1957: *Venture Science Fiction,* Vol. 1, No. 1; bi-monthly; digest size; Robert Mills, editor.

FEBRUARY

1931: *Astounding Stories of Super Science* becomes *Astounding Stories.*
1936: *Astounding Stories* now has trimmed edges.
1939: *Dynamic Science Stories* (Red Circle), Vol. 1, No. 1; pulp size; bi-monthly; Robert Erisman, editor.
(marginal) *Strange Stories,* Vol. 1, No. 1; pulp size; bi-monthly; Mort Weisinger, editor.
1940: *Astonishing Stories,* Vol. 1, No. 1; pulp size; bi-monthly; Frederik Pohl, editor.
(marginal) *Unknown* becomes *Unknown Fantasy Fiction.*
1941: (marginal) *Stirring Science Stories,* Vol. 1, No. 1; pulp size; bi-monthly; Donald A. Wollheim, editor.
(marginal) Final issue of *Strange Stories,* Vol. 5, No. 1.
1946: (marginal) *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* returns to bi-monthly schedule.
1947: (marginal) *Avon Fantasy Reader* No. 1; digest size; Donald A. Wollheim, editor.
1953: Final issue of *Wonder Stories Annual,* Vol. 2, No. 1.

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Inside Science Fiction

(*continued from page 25*)

ed in obtaining it and, as was visibly displayed at the convention, was eminently successful as chairman of the affair. Ted, as oldtimers in the field will recall, was once an active fanzine publisher and letter writer. Today he is editor of two outstanding British s-f magazines, *New Worlds* and *Science Fantasy*.

Approximately 300 s-f devotees attended, including a plane-load of 55 from the United States. This "Wings Over the World" idea was, at first, considered a fantastic concept. Not too long ago it was considered quite a feat for fans to travel several hundred miles to attend s-f gatherings. And the prospect of an entire plane-load of s-f fans traveling clear across the Atlantic Ocean *did* appear startling. However, primarily through the efforts of Dave and Ruth Kyle (nee Landis) the dream materialized. Dave and Ruth, by the way, were married immediately prior to the convention, and utilized the trip as their honeymoon. Greater faith have no fen than to share their honeymoon with 53 stfans.

At this point it should be mentioned that we, and the editorial "we" is being utilized here, attended the convention as TAFF delegate. TAFF stands for Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund, an organization established for the purpose of sending an unofficial representative of fandom to a foreign convention. For instance, H. Ken Bulmer was elected to this honor in 1955 and attended the Clevention. This year, as the world convention was being held out-

[*turn page*]

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side of America, an American was elected to attend. And editorial "we" happened to be that very fortunate and highly honored representative. For which we shall be eternally grateful.

Considering its location, the convention was well attended. Present were most of the great names of British science fiction. John Wyndham—formerly known as John Benyon Harris—was present in the capacity of President of the convention committee. John Wyndham, of course, is the author of the very popular novel, *"Day of the Triffids."* Of course Arthur C. Clarke was there, even though he had to fly all the way from Ceylon to make it. Arthur, an active fan back in the thirties, one of the greatest of science fiction writers today, was last year's Guest of Honor. Another former fanzine editor present was Sam Youd—now known as John Christopher—whose novel, "No Blade of Grass," was a *Saturday Evening Post* sensation, and which is now being filmed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

It would be difficult to recall offhand most of the British celebrities present. However, some of the others were the incredibly popular Eric Frank Russell, whose stories have been appearing for more than twenty years; John K. H. Brunner, Peter Phillips, William F. Temple, H. Ken Bulmer, and E. C. Tubb, all of whose stories are seen in American magazines; then there were Brian W. Aldiss, James White, Frank E. Arnold, artist James Rattigan—and many more whose names elude us at the moment.

BUT DON'T get the impression that all the "big names" present were from the United Kingdom. Far from it. The Guest of Honor was the man who has probably done more to advance science fiction than any other, the editor of today's leading s-f magazine, John W. Campbell. Present to cover the convention for Larry Shaw's *Infinity* was the most prolific of contemporary s-f writers, Robert Silverberg; covering the affair for the bi-weekly s-f newspaper, *Science Fiction Times,* was an oldtime writer, once again actively penning good s-f, John Victor Peterson. Harry Harrison and Robert Abernathy were among those comprising the "Wings Over the World" group.

This convention was quite unusual indeed. American conventions usually culminate with the banquet at which the festivities reach their climax. The British fans (and it was the British *fans* who worked hard for months on end to make 1957's convention one of the most enjoyable) decided to *start off* the convention with the banquet. A novel idea—but one

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that proved to be a start move. After a fine meal (at a cost of one-third the price of the average American banquet) John Wyndham proposed a toast to the Queen. After the toast John Wyndham said, "Ladies & Gentlemen—you can now smoke." It was interesting to observe the simultaneous lighting of several hundred cigarets, cigars and pipes. Pyromaniacs would have chortled in glee at the blaze.

At any rate, the time had come for Arthur C. Clarke to introduce the Guest of Honor, John W. Campbell. Mr. Clarke stated that Mr. Campbell had published more *good* science fiction than any other editor. To which the multitude roared, "Hear! Hear!" Mr. Campbell spoke on how an editor is smarter or more brilliant than the writer, but because the editor should know what the changing trends in s-f are—and this knowledge should, in one way or the other, be transferred to the up and coming writer. He stated that the writer should be cornered in the editor's office, he should be gotten talking and, between editor and writer, various ideas should be kicked around, combined with idea of others, and blended into something original. In other words, the editor doesn't originate the idea, but coordinates ideas of the past with those of the present writer and the writer than originates.

In essence, said Mr. Campbell, the right story of yesterday is certainly not the right story of today. An editor must necessarily be a prophet to keep and expand his readership. He must be able to visualize (guess, in reality) what the reader of tomorrow will want. The late lamented *Unknown* was mentioned as an example of *not* figuring out the reader. While many readers were violently enthusiastic over *Unknown*, there just weren't enough of them. Mr. Campbell's speech was well received by the audience.

Forrest J Ackerman brought the round of toasts to a conclusion with one to Absent Friends. Forrie mentioned, and eulogized, those who could no longer be with us, such as H. G. Wells, Bob Olsen, and Ray Cummings. This was followed by several short statements by celebrities present, plus one not-so-short statement by Sam Moskowitz who brought out the interesting fact that present at the London Convention were eight stfans who had also been present at the first world convention in New York, 1939.

A toast to the convention committee was then proposed by the TAFF delegate. Being a veritable old graybeard, we recalled the earliest convention held in Philadel-

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phia in 1936, attended by 16 fans, none old enough to vote. The progress of conventions through the years was mentioned, and the incredible amount of work necessary to put on a big convention was stressed. To the convention committee we expressed thanks for all the time, effort and money which had gone into creating the London World Science Fiction Convention. To these stalwarts who work far into the night—night after night—without the profit motive in mind—without, in fact, any *hope* of profit—we again toast you. We toast Roberta Wild, who handled all the secretarial work; Charles Duncombe and Sandy Sanderson, who were the financial wizards; Joy and Vincent Clarke, who handled the publicity for Britain, and Pamela and H. Ken Bulmer, the overseas publicity agents; the hardworking Programme Committee, headed up by Dave Newman and Norman Shorrock; and to Walter Willis, Eric Jones, John Rolts, Ken Slater, and all the others who helped.

EVERY YEAR, Achievement awards are given for outstanding performance in the science fiction field. This year three "Hugos" were awarded: John W. Campbell accepted one for the best science fiction magazine, *Astounding;* Ted Carnell took time out from his Chairmanship activities to proudly accept the Hugo for the best British s-f magazine, *New Worlds;* and John Victor Peterson, representing *Science Fiction Times,* accepted the Hugo for the best fan magazine. Roberta Wild, who presented the awards, announced that the races were quite close, with *Fantasy and Science Fiction* giving *Astounding* a run for its money, *Nebula* breathing hot and heavy on the heels of *New Worlds,* and *Hyphen* (edited by Walter Willis, Ireland's gift to fandom) giving Jimmy Taurasi and Ray Van Houten quite a scare.

Other adopted customs of science fiction conventions featured were the costume party and the auction. BBC was on hand with its microphones and cameras recording the gaily and fantastically dressed "gentle beings". (Term "gentle beings" copyrighted by A. C. Clarke, 1957.) E.C. Tubb, who can only be described as impossible, is the auctioneer in England, as Sam Moskowitz is the auctioneer at American conventions. Ted, in his enthusiasm, has been known to do strange things—at one time auctioning off a convention attendee's wife.

An interesting phenomenon of British fandom is the infinite detail utilized in their fannish productions. For instance, tapes produced by Norman Shorrock and the Liverpool group were pre-

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sented: "The March of Slime" and "Last and First Fen." Replete with appropriate background music, professional-calibre narration, and subtly humorous fannish allusions, these taped programs were among the high-spots of the convention. Also, in the same vein, the Cheltenham group, headed up by Eric Jones, presented an incredibly impressive "Ceremony of St. Fantony," during which several attendees were taken into the noble and illustrious order of St. Fantony. We were one of those so honored, and never forgotten will be the passing of the prescribed test.

John W. Campbell spoke the final day of the affair on Psionics, a subject with which he is quite taken. Mr. Campbell stated that throughout history the scientific world is suspicious of accepting results that cannot be understood or defined. Psionics is now in this stage and, as such, research must be continued by intelligent amateurs. This is the first step in the creation of a science. As would be expected, there was a lengthy discussion period following Campbell's speech. There were also Psionic demonstrations.

Something new for science fiction conventions was a battle to the end between three acknowledged s-f experts (acknowledged by themselves, that is). Sam Moskowitz, Forrest J Ackerman, and your correspondent fired questions back and forth at each other with machine-gun rapidity. However, no one went down to inglorious defeat as the contest ended in a dead heat with each contestant falling down on one question. Following this battle of wits (?), Sam Moskowitz stayed on the platform and discussed his re-

[*turn page*]

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cent project, "The Science Fiction Market Research Analysis," which is covered in detail in "Inside Science Fiction," in *Science Fiction Stories*, January, 1958.

From a social standpoint the convention was quite successful. The English, knowing the American desire for keen intellectual discussion, kept the bar in the lobby and lounge open 24 hours a day. Consequently, at any hour of the day one could find keen intellectual discussion going on between several convention parties, which consist of 75 people in one double bedroom.

The English proved they could put on a successful and entertaining world convention. With fan groups coming to the fore in Sweden (represented at this convention by Lars Helander), in Germany (represented by Rainer Eeisfeld, Anne Steul, and others, and in many other countries, it is quite conceivable that "World" conventions, in the literal sense of the word, will become the custom rather than the exception.

One final note. It will be "Southgate in '58," Southgate being a suburb of Los Angeles. Memberships now being taken at $1 by F. J Ackerman, 915 S. Sherbourne Drive, Los Angeles 35, California. Join early and receive all the convention information and publicity.

THE FANZINES

IN KEEPING with the international atmosphere of this issue's "Inside S-F," we thought it would be appropriate to devote some space to briefly reviewing representative fanzines of the United Kingdom. Fanzine publishing in England has a long history: they go all the way back to 1936 when Maurice K. Hanson issued his mimeographed *Novae Terrae* and which was soon followed by Walter H. Gillings' printed *Scientifiction*. These early fan publications were devoted almost exclusively to the subject matter of science fiction itself: biographies of authors, bibliographies, articles on s-f collecting, literary criticism, et cetera. Today in Great Britain, as in America, the fanzine, in most cases, bears little resemblance to its forebears. It is less serious, devotes more space to personalities, stresses humor and, in essence, the editor doesn't take his magazine nor himself too seriously. Sample one or two of the following: they're all recommended.

TRIODE: edited by Eric Bentcliffe. 15c for a sample copy to Dale R. Smith, 3001 Kyle Avenue, Minneapolis 22, Minnesota. This one has seen about a dozen issues, all of which average around 50 mimeographed pages. Fifty *well* mimeod pages, we might add. The

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English are noted for publishing completely legible magazines; literate, too. Perhaps a little too verbose at times; but then the average Englishman isn't noted for being "a man of few words."

A noteworthy feature of *Triode* is the comprehensive coverage given various conventions held in Europe. For instance, Julian Parr reported on the first German convention in such a way that, after reading the article, one felt that he already could visualize what type of people comprised "Gerfantum." This article was accompanied by a full page of photos of such German luminaries as editor Walter Ernsting, top fans Walt Spiegl and Anne Steul, and American writer Raymond Z. Gallun. Why Ray Gallun was attending a convention in Wetzlar, we have no idea. And Julian Parr makes no mention of it. But that is typical of foreign fandom: they have little use for the "vile pro," although they have been known, at times, to permit Arthur Clarke, Eric Frank Russell, and E. C. Tubb entrance to their conferences.

Other enjoyable items in recent issues were the reports on England's annual affair, held in Kettering, and, from

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Lund, Lars Helander's account of the first Swedish convention. For collectors E, J. Carnell reviews the latest s-f books published in GB and, every now and then, someone cuts loose with a little package for 15¢.

PLOY: EDITED by Ron Bennett. 15¢ for a sample from Bob Pavlat, 6001 43rd Avenue, Hyattsville, Maryland. Quite similar in many respects to *Trode*, Ploy is an "irregular quarterly," well mimeod, well edited, and well worth its modest price tag. *Ploy*, too, features lengthy, meaty (with the meat quite juicy convention reports. Archie Mercer penned a very *Confidential* account of Cytricon III (Kettering) in a recent issue. Included was a full page of photos of such people as Peter Hamilton (editor *Nebula*), E. C. Tubb, Ken Bulmer (with active fan-wife Pamela), Walt Willis, and other British personalities.

I'm out of space now, so will have to continue this in the March *Science Fiction Stories*. There's more to tell you about *Ploy*, and a couple of others.

Send all fanzines for review to Robert A. Madle: 7720 Oxman Road, Hyattsville, Maryland.

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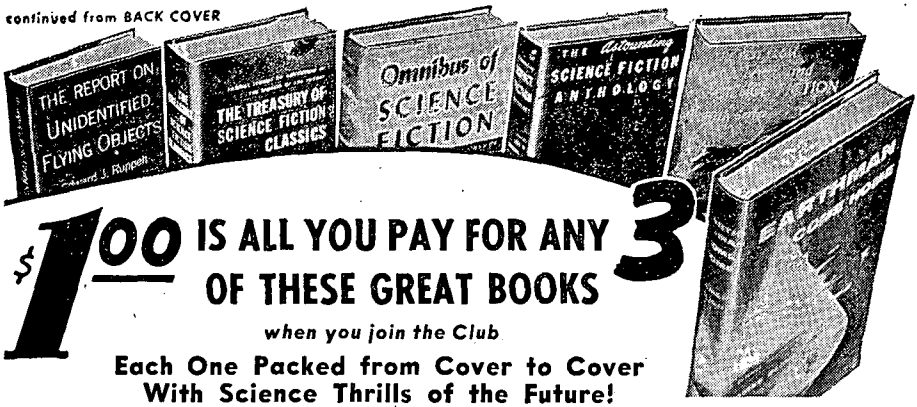
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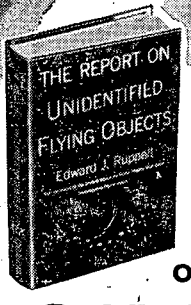

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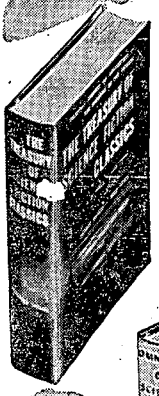

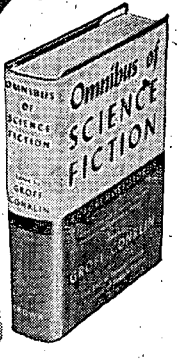

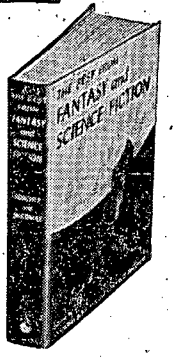

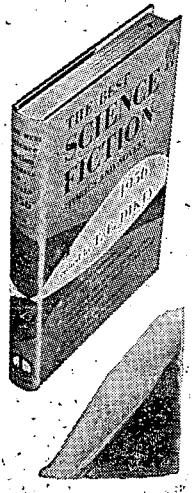

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